A Noble Kinsman

by

Anton Guilio Barrili.

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A NOBLE KINSMAN.

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A NOBLE KINSMAN

A NOVEL

BY

ANTON GIULIO BARRILI

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY

H. A. MARTIN

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A NOBLE KINSMAN.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE FRISIO ROCK.

FOR those who would see Naples at a glance there is no better standpoint than the Frisio rock. Certainly the view from the baths of San Martino or Mount Vesuvius may be bolder, but this attraction is counterbalanced by the fatigue encountered in attaining your position; whereas, from the Frisio rock you can gaze at your ease on the landscape beneath, while resting yourself at the inn and tranquilly eating your maccaroni or having your soup and oysters that are daily brought from Taranto.

Neapolitans themselves visit this spot but rarely, and only when they wish to show hospitality to some stranger, part of which, no doubt, consists in taking them to the pleasantest places, and letting them judge of what I may call local flavour. A dinner at the Frisio rock is indeed one of the most enjoyable things

in the world. Seated at table, with your elbow resting on the balustrade, you can throw the stones of your olives, as you eat them, into the bay. The sea breaks with a gentle murmur on a greenish rock, which, in its time, must have been the foundation of one of those terraces over the water—that luxury of wealthy Romans which, more than once, made the contented Horace himself grumble; then an expanse of blue, as wide as the bay, stretches away from the Castello dell' Ovo, watching it, apparently, like an advanced guard to the island of Capri, which seems to close it, with its sharply-cut cliffs, tinted crimson and violet by the sun, setting in the midst of golden clouds.

The promontory of Posilipo at your back cuts off the view of Procida, Nisida, and Ischia, a group of Nereids swimming—

"Half-immersed in the waves,"

opposite the curving shores of Pozzuoli and Baia, between Posilipo and Cape Miseno.

When you have looked sufficiently at the view from Capri to Cape Campanella, and then to the jagged rocks behind which Amalfi is concealed, the white houses of Sorrento at a greater distance, and Vesuvius and Torre del Greco; when you have refreshed yourself properly with the sea breezes, and let them blow away the last puff of smoke from your cigar, then proceed slowly down the lane leading from the inn to the shore, and take a boat as far as the Villa Nazionale, or go back to the gate by which you came in, and so on, towards Posilipo.

But we must not wander too far away from the Frisio rock, or we shall lose sight of the company that was assembled there one beautiful June afternoon in the year of grace 1869. This group consisted of some fifteen or twenty young men, gathered round a table.

The dinner, which was just over, had been given to a Florentine, a dramatic author, whose much-admired comedy had just appeared at the Teatro del Fondo; and among the company were dukes, princes, marquises, and barons, choice spirits, and unoccupied dramatic authors.

The saying of a famous personage, "What gentleman has not written a tragedy?" is particularly applicable in Naples. With this difference, however, that the fashion of tragedies being of the past, these distinguished gentlemen had devoted themselves to comedy, whiling away their leisure hours in the cultivation of the Muses—

"Cui giovano le quinte e la ribaltas."

The toasts were at an end. Neither was anything more being said about the Emperor Tiberius, a stock subject when people are drinking Capri wine, and have his beloved island before their eyes. The conversation after many subjects had been touched upon had reached the favourite theme of discourse among all young men satirists, viz., love, that love which is the great thing in youth and the essential part of art.

"Yes, love is a beautiful thing," said the Florentine, who was in a pleasant, after-dinner frame of mind; "but, gentlemen, you must remember that there are different kinds of love. Venus is *mater amorum*.

But what sort of thing is love in these days of ours? Which kind of love does the present company prefer? An affection like Dante's, respectful and ideal, for a lady; sage and smiling, but cold at the same time? Or like the love of Giovanni di Certaldo for King Robert's daughter, who, by the way, must have been a very indulgent father, seldom to be met with? Or like Tarquato Tasso's, abounding in woes, destroying your peace, and robbing you of your senses at last."

"As for me, I like them all, and more kinds if there are any," cried Baron di Sambiase, who had a neck and shoulders strong enough for a thousand.

"Excuse me," replied the Florentine, "that seems to me a little too much. Not in number, I mean, but in quality. Several love affairs weaken one another, and there is Lodovico Ariosto, who could never make up his mind to finish Jacopo Artis."

"The age is inclined to melancholy," remarked the Prince of Nicastro.

"Allow me, Prince," began Garantini, a lawyer, and one of the foremost at the Neapolitan bar, no longer in his first youth, but appearing young enough in lively company; "twenty or thirty years ago it was so, but now the age of romance is over. Italy is becoming Greek and Roman again; and here we are in Magna Grecia, are we not?"

"As to that, you may make your mind easy, I can assure you of it, book in hand," remarked a neighbour of the lawyer's, with pretended gravity.

"Thanks, Carafa, and may Heaven reward you for your assistance. To come back to the matter in hand, it seems to me that love should become Hellenic

again ; that is, gay, bright, and serene, like our sky, like our sun, like our gardens."

"Yes, but strong like the juice of our grapes, glowing like our sun, and with a pinch of sulphur in it!" added Carafa, in the midst of a general laugh.

"And you, William the Silent, what would you like?"

This remark was addressed to a young man, handsome, and of prepossessing appearance, and more reserved than suited that jovial hour. Though the name of William of Orange was not his, he raised his head at this question, and said—

"My friends, I am weary of easy love-making, so monotonous and commonplace."

"What an idea, Renato!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that kind of easy-going love which imagines itself to feel deeply, and at the most only touches the surface—a light pastime to while away a long day, diversions, as our friend Sant' Angelo (who likes exactness) would say, diversions for rocking the mind to sleep. I mean that sort of love which gives no feeling of ecstasy, which people take as it comes, resting on nothing but upon some feelings in common, and carried on out of idleness; this sort of love, when compared with the reality, is like a copy to the original, like melancholy to sadness, like good humour to blissfulness."

"Good heavens, you must explain yourself!"

"Hear the rest, since you have made me begin. I should like a fiery and tremendous sort of passion, something that really caught hold of me, so that

some day I could say: 'I have lived, I have loved.' And therefore I should like an accompaniment of strange, romantic, or dramatic circumstances, hindrances impossible to foresee, necessitating a struggle, and involving me in some great difficulty."

"Like Mars in Vulcan's toils?"

"And why not? Those toils were an allegory, an allegory like many that were such a delight to the Greeks. And I am sure among the Greeks I should have fallen in love with some one in the house of Atreus, either with Helen or Clytemnestra or Electra, with all the dangers, remorses, terrors, and furies that accompanied those wonderful women. If a Roman, I should have loved a vestal virgin; if a barbarian, a Druidical priestess. And this, not from any love of strange things, or wonderful doings; but because I think that real feeling, struggles, excitement, difficulty, are the proper surroundings of beauty, and the indispensable nourishment of love; because in the conditions of our everyday life there is no opening for these strong affections. Some people merely look on love as a means of carrying on the race; to others it means gratified vanity or gallantry, or a refuge from *ennui*. Now I have done."

The Duke of Melito, for such was the speaker's name, had never before made a speech of such a length. Therefore his outburst met with all the approbation which is usually given to a speech, especially when happily it is over.

It was the turn of the Florentine to speak, or more correctly, his entertainers left the reply open to him.

"There's a great deal of truth in what you say,

Signor Duca," remarked he. "But modern society no longer offers so effective a termination to modern authors. The house of Atreus is of the past; there are no more temples of Vesta, nor, since the suppression of convents, retreats, where all the beauty of a potent aristocracy could be assembled. Gentlemen, you must have patience; the more civilized the world becomes, the more it becomes inclined to Philistinism. The chosen people are disappearing; the vulgar herd is taking possession of the field. Even women are following the general law. Let them be as cultivated as the Greek hetares, lofty as Roman matrons, poetical as the virgins of Ossian, splendid as the ladies of the Renaissance, they are all alike in this: a waltz begins the poem, a glance at her father's table, instead of at the gathering of the fleets; then comes the formal proposal, the wedding, a box at the theatre, visiting, driving, *ennui*, sighing, flirting, and the Iliad is complete. Where is romance now-a-days, except in booksellers' windows? Sometimes there is a little variety, but only in length of purse; the wealthy rival wins the day, the poor one is rejected; no more rope-ladders, or elopements, or duels. Carbineers, judges and juries, a whole army set to keep order, have brought us to this pass. No more pungent sauces; all French cookery, delicate, certainly, but insipid."

"Still," replied the Duke of Melito, "pardon me, but I do not think it is so exactly. It certainly looks like it, but even modern society has its depths, and dramatic subjects are to be found without looking for them in an Assize Court. Moreover, I don't know

exactly what I want, but my impression is that an attachment, uncommon and attended with difficulties, will be my lot. If not, and if I should not be clever enough to discover it, so much the worse."

"Say, rather, so much the better, Signor. And what becomes of your peace of mind, of that fruitful quiet, which every one needs who has a great work on hand? You lose your time in some unfortunate or stormy passion, like a journey made in the old fashion on the outside of a *diligence*. The engine on its rails, and easy-going love without convulsions and heart-burnings, believe me, spare a great deal of time to short-lived humanity."

CHAPTER II.

THE HAND OF DESTINY.

THE Duke of Melito gave a courteous bow, like a person who, though unconvinced by the reasoning he has been listening to, has no wish to prolong the argument till it becomes wearisome. In the meantime, the hour had arrived for leaving this enchanting place. Sant' Angelo, a Greek at heart, poured a glass of wine into the sea as an offering to Neptune.

"Then we go by water?" inquired Garantini.

"Why?" replied Sant' Angelo.

"Because I see that you are propitiating Neptune."

"And let us go by water," said Sant' Angelo then; "at least, if our guest has no objection."

"A capital idea!" exclaimed the Florentine, "the sea is so beautiful."

Nicastro came to the edge of the balcony—

"Boat here!"

"Here, sir," said a boatman, who had been resting on his oars, waiting.

"I am here, sir," added another, trying to get to the foot of the rock first.

"Away with you!" cried the first, who did not relish being interfered with.

"I was here before you," retorted the other.

And they began to wrangle. In the meantime the gentlemen had come down to the water's edge, and Nicastro settled the matter at once with a peremptory argument.

"There are enough for both of you, don't you see? Now, let us embark. Where shall we land? At the Villa?"

"I shall be there later," said Carafa; "but I must first go to the Teatro del Fondo, to see if they have kept a box for me."

"Then you land at the Piliero? All right, you will come to meet us through the Chiaia."

"So be it," replied Carafa; "well, then, who comes with me?"

"I do," said Renato.

"And I," added Garantini; "moreover, all who are not going in our boat may go to the Fondo with you."

While this chatter, accompanied by much laughing, was going on, the party were taking their seats in the two boats; the larger number in the first with their guest, five more in the second, as escort to Carafa, for so they put it. Renato, the last to get in, took his seat in the stern, near the rudder.

"Mind, Renato, don't take us the wrong way with your absurd ideas. We are bound for the Immacolatella, and you must steer for the other side of the Castello dell' Ovo."

"Thanks," said Renato, with a smile.

The sun, near setting, was shedding a lovely crimson light on Capri and the distant hills near Amalfi. Renato was grave and silent. After the exertion of that long speech he had retired into the background, like the glow-worm when its light has gone out.

"I hope," Carafa whispered into his ear, "that all those declarations of yours to-day were in joke."

"I? What are you thinking about?" Renato asked, starting, like a man suddenly roused from his slumbers.

"It occurs to me that perhaps you are right, up to a certain point," replied his friend; "but I should not like to see you make the experiment. And as I know your disposition——"

"Hold your tongue, at present; I am not in love," interrupted Renato. "I have only said what I think; and in matters of opinion, I hope——"

"Opinions are free," replied Carafa; "but mind, I hope you have not expressed an ill-omened wish."

"Come, now, you don't believe in such nonsense?"

"I—I don't know anything about it. And you, how do you know it is nonsense? There's a great deal yet in the world unexplained; and you oughtn't to deny a thing just because you don't understand it. Remember the verse in the 'Contemplations:' Montaigne says, 'Who knows?' and Rabelais, 'Perhaps.'"

"And if it were so," Renato said, "I should not consider it a misfortune if some day, say to-day, what I wished for just now should happen to me. That trifling love-making and flirting, you know, Antonio, never were to my taste."

"What are you talking about over there?" de-

manded Garantini, interrupting the chat with his friends on the seats near him.

"Nothing, only Renato is giving a *réchauffé* of the speech he made a little while ago."

"Renato wishes for a dramatic passion? I shall arrange it for him," replied Garantini. "What would you say, Renato, what would you say to the love of a Medea, a sexagenarian? You can have it; an old acquaintance of mine is most anxious to find a Jason. But what is that grimace for, Melito?"

"Hold your tongue, Garantini," said Renato, giving this brusque reply in a gentle tone.

"Let us change the conversation then; but I warn you that you are losing a good opportunity. You aren't angry, surely?"

"I? Why should you think so?"

In the meantime the boats, vigorously propelled by two rowers as eager to receive a good reward as the young Duke of Melito was to feel some stirring emotion, had turned the point at the Castello dell' Ovo, and arrived at the end of the pier, when a forest of masts began to appear, or, to express ourselves with more moderation, a number of vessels at anchor in the harbour.

One of these vessels, rather larger than the others, seemed about to set sail, and the creaking of the windlasses and rattling of chains told plainly enough that they were lifting her anchors. It was a brigantine, perfectly new; and apparently there had just been some festivity on board, as four or five boats were at that moment leaving the side of the vessel, all filled with gentlemen and ladies, probably friends

and relations of the captain, supercargo, or even of the consignee.

As the young gentlemen in their boats gave a hasty glance at this scene, Renato's attention was attracted by a young man in the bows, who had clambered up into the rigging to wave a handkerchief and to give a final adieu to some one who had just left the ship. Following the direction of his hand, Renato's eyes fell on a boat at a short distance from him, where two persons, a gentleman and a lady, were standing in the stern. The gentleman seemed old, the lady was young, and looked graceful and pretty. Both responded—the former with his hand, and the girl with her handkerchief—to the salutations of the sailor.

The boat containing Renato and his friends, on its way to the landing-place, almost touched the other. And as they came nearer, Renato could see the two figures distinctly, or more exactly the graceful young lady, for the old man naturally did not interest him much.

The young lady, for such her dress and the look of her face showed her to be, was certainly good-looking. She was tall and slight, like one of the Graces, and her pale complexion gave her beautifully-made face the appearance of marble; her eyes were dark, her hair dark also; as it lay in rich masses on her forehead, she was a living instance of that harmonious exuberance of form which Athenian artists envied in the inhabitants of Magna Grecia. And was this girl conscious of her great beauty? Probably not, for from the unaffected expression of her face one could not imagine her vain like Venus or proud like Juno.

Moreover, at that moment she was watching the brigantine so intently, that she was neither conscious of the vicinity of the boat nor of the admiration of which she was the object.

"How beautiful she is," exclaimed Antonio Carafa, for he too was struck by her remarkable appearance.

"Yes, beautiful indeed!" exclaimed Renato, mechanically.

"And that looks to me a handsome fellow too, that sailor up there in the rigging," continued Carafa; "her lover, perhaps."

"Why a lover?" said Renato. "Might it not be a brother?"

"Well, let us suppose so," replied Carafa. "I am not wedded to my opinion, and give in."

But why had Renato jumped to this arbitrary conclusion? He could not have told himself, and he did not probe the depths of his mind to discover the reason; but it somehow annoyed him to think that the affections of this beautiful girl, born, or meant to be, a princess, should be wasted on a common sailor, and that the latter had presumed so far as to gain her affections. "Aristocratic haughtiness," the reader will say; and I am not going to defend the Duke of Melito, who was filled with all the prejudices of his caste. In the meantime the boat containing Renato and his friend had overtaken and passed the one where this divine creature was. Not being able to stop, he would like to have turned about; but how could he do this with any show of reason? Would not Antonio have laughed him to scorn? Happily Antonio was the first to begin to watch the girl, and

Renato took courage, and turned right round to look at her. The boat was making its way slowly from the brigantine, and the girl still stood motionless, with her eyes riveted on the sailor up in the rigging.

Renato guessed from the direction which the boat was taking that these two strangers would also land at the Immacolatella, so called from an image of the Immaculate Virgin, sculptured in marble, which, I fear, cannot be intended to represent the Custom House.

Arrived at the landing-place the young friends mounted the steps leading into the Via del Piliero, and set off in haste towards Castel Nuovo. The Duke of Melito, however, lingered behind, silent and vacillating in his movements, like a mathematician absorbed in the solution of a difficult problem. Antonio Carafa, as already narrated, was on his way to the Teatro del Fondo, not far off in the Strada del Molo, and the others were escorting him, intending to make their way afterwards towards Chiaia, when he had secured a box for that evening. Evidently Renato could not accompany them to Chiaia, and the Teatro del Fondo itself seemed too far; for as they came to the corner he told Antonio that he was going to buy some cigars. Cigars! he who only smoked a cigarette with some difficulty.

"I shall overtake you," he said, to gain time; "and if I don't come at once," he added, in a low voice, "you will see me again later at the theatre."

"Aha, aha!" exclaimed Carafa, giving his friend a glance that, in the words of the Bible, tried his heart and reins.

But Renato gave him another so beseeching that Antonio felt compassionate, and kept to himself a joke that was on the end of his tongue.

"Good luck!" he said, in a low voice; and he proceeded with his other friends towards the theatre.

Renato at last had solved his problem. He had scarcely seen his friends walk off before he turned on his heel, and instead of entering the tobacconist's, turned the corner in haste, and hurried down the Via del Piliero, like a debtor pursued by bailiffs. In sight of the Immacolatella, he slackened his speed. He was in time. The girl and the old gentleman were coming out of the Custom House door; silently and slowly, like people weary, or deeply moved, they turned to the right, towards Marinella. However they were not going so far. Near the Pietra del Pesce, they turned into one of those lanes at right angles to the Via del Sidile di Porto, a filthy street, swarming with inhabitants, where eyes, ears, and nose are almost equally offended.

Renato followed them slowly. The declining evening light, and the coming and going of all those busy people, allowed him to do so without attracting the attention of any one.

The other two, with the young Duke of Melito dogging their steps, mounted, by all those turnings and windings which mark the ascent of Pendino, up to the Via dell' Università, and at about two-thirds of the length turned to the left into the lane called Donna Romita.

The name was poetical, and, in a sense, of good

omen. But Renato felt a pang at the thought that such beauty, and in appearance such nobility, should have to live in this melancholy and apparently unhealthy spot. In the windings of the Via del Sedile di Porto, taking advantage of the crowd, he had been able for a moment to come nearer to her, and hear something of what she was saying.

"Poor Corrado," the old man had said; "God knows when we shall see him again."

"Never fear, father; he will be back soon. Corrado has promised it, and he will keep his word."

"My dear child," muttered the old man, in a melancholy voice, "you don't know what it is to make a living; and your brother——"

"Yes; I understand," interrupted the girl; "but you see, father, Corrado has got a talisman that works miracles."

Renato could hear no more, because at that moment the two speakers began the ascent, and he was obliged to keep at a civil distance. But two things, or rather three, had given him joy enough to satisfy a lover for a week. First, her voice, a sweet, silvery, caressing voice, which stirred him to the depths of his heart. Then, to hear that the sailor was not her betrothed, but her brother—her brother really, as he had maintained from the first. Finally, the name of Corrado, which seemed to denote a certain rank in his family, and which to him seemed a sort of secret link with people whom he had never seen till now. The name of Corrado, like that of Renato, was common among his family; in fact, one might be said to alternate with the other, through five centuries of nobility, in

a family older than the days of the Houses of Swabia and Anjou, favoured by the Aragonese with every kind of prerogative, and loaded with titles by Spaniards and Bourbons, according to the ostentatious fashion of the times.

All these seemed sufficient reasons for making him eager about the matter which chance, or fate, had brought into his hands. Like Ruth in Boaz's field, who gleaned the ears of corn left behind by the reapers, he kept gleaning up useful bits of information to satisfy his youthful curiosity.

But was it all curiosity, simple curiosity which had seized him in the middle of the harbour and carried him through all those streets and those turnings and windings?

At that moment Renato remembered the words of Antonio Carafa; then his vow, scarcely uttered, had been heard. And in what an intricate romance, in what network had he been involved by destiny? Would it not be wiser to stop while he could still do so without pain, and carefully to retrace his steps? Evidently, between the wish so impressively expressed by him at the Frisio rock, and the appearance of this wonderful girl, there was some mysterious connection—enough to make the most materialist of philosophers, and this Renato was not, thoughtful.

Therefore! Therefore, after having considered the pros and cons, thereby giving some time to the couple in front to make their way through the lane, Renato shrugged his shoulders impatiently, like Cæsar at the crossing of the Rubicon, set fire to his ships like Fernando Cortez, and followed the girl.

"The Fates will it," said one of the ancients; and another added, "The Fates themselves find a way." The young Duke of Melito left destiny to the task of guiding him along the paths of the future, and concerned himself about nothing, except to know the number of the house where this wonderful beauty dwelt.

And to ascertain it, he of course followed her to the very end; but happily without having to go any farther than Donna Romita lane.

Gentle readers, let us, with Renato, repeat, "Donna Romita, good name and good omen." This was the antidote to the evil prognostications of Antonio Carafa.

CHAPTER III.

LA NUNZIATA.

WE have seen what became of the two persons whom our young hero had followed so persistently through the streets of the old part of Naples. And now we must turn back a step to see where they came from.

Signor Martino Palmanova was one of the best known shipowners and merchants of the Piliero, and his ships were to be met on many seas. Without being an eagle, he had been among the first to comprehend that the age of cockle-shells was past, and that to keep up the credit of the Italian mercantile navy, vessels of greater tonnage, like the Genoese, were required, thereby economizing in the expense of fitting out, and keeping up with the great carriers of the globe, the Americans and English, who made the discovery before us, and accordingly have become the masters of the sea.

Signor Martino had by degrees got rid of his old fleet of feluccas and tartanes and provided himself with three-masters instead. The reader has already

seen one, the third in order of construction, just on the point of lifting her anchor near the entrance of the harbour. It was a brigantine, of about a thousand tons, launched about a month before at Sestri Ponente, on the Western Riviera ; and Signor Martino Palmanova had loaded it with Neapolitan wine and other products of the country, on commission from his correspondents in Lima.

The lading of the brigantine named *La Nunziata*, was complete, and she was just about to sail. Her name, *La Nunziata*, was that of Signor Martino's only daughter, a pretty girl of seventeen, with hair like spun gold, eyes as blue as the sea in some deep bay, and cheeks lightly tinged, like the leaf of a crimson rose.

That very evening the brigantine was to sail. And Signor Martino, who had promised his daughter to give a little party on board, killed two birds that day with one stone : he gave his Nunziata pleasure, and he also saw that all was right on board, exemplifying the well-known proverb : " The master's eye fattens the horse." Friends and relations had accepted Signor Martino's invitation with pleasure, and the cabin was scarcely large enough to hold all the gay company who had assembled to drink the health of the two Nunziata's—the ship and its fair namesake.

The gentlemen, no degenerate descendants of Noah, had washed down their Taranto oysters with Capri wine, and drunk the ladies' health in champagne. The latter contented themselves with touching their glasses with their lips, preferring sweets and ices, while that wonderful amphitheatre of the city, spread

out under the deep blue sky before their eyes, added to the charm of their beauty and their natural gaiety.

In the midst of all the merriment, Nunziata, the queen of the feast, was sorrowful. She responded to all attention shown her, and tried to smile; but in her studied gaiety there was something perceptibly wanting. Twice over Signor Martino had asked his daughter if anything was the matter with her, as she did not seem so gay as usual; and the girl had replied that she had never felt better in her life, and that she was all right, only the movement of the vessel seemed a little strange.

"You are right, my dear," said Signor Martino; "love the sea, and remain on shore."

"Indeed, I can't understand why men leave their homes to go to sea."

And so saying, Nunziata gave a piteous glance out of her blue eyes at a young sailor, to whom it was as welcome as the friendly beacon over a stormy sea.

And was this a genuine sailor, this youth she was looking at so compassionately? He was dressed like a sailor, but his face was too fair and his hands too finely made for a Jack Tar. Corrado Altavilla (even his name suggested no mean descent) was scarcely eighteen, and was now, for the first time, trusting himself to the faithless element. Rich in nothing but in his youth, he was going to seek his fortune beyond the sea. Worldly wealth was scarce, as you see, but fortune, according to the proverb, favours the young; and Corrado Altavilla, having had no experience of the truth of the proverb in his own country, was going to test it in a foreign land.

At Naples life is not harder than in any other Italian city; rather one may say, though Naples is the most populous of all, it is the city where one can live with least expense, as its bright sky is to be had for nothing, and almost for nothing its fertile soil. But Corrado Altavilla wanted more than a livelihood. For this, some modest situation would have sufficed, when added to the proceeds of a small property near Casoria, his mother's slender portion, and to the little his father made with the sale of his water-colours and sketches in oil.

Ruggero Altavilla, for such was the name of the old man, had seen better days. But a long and ruinous lawsuit with his own relations, lasting through many years, added to the hatred and persecution of the Bourbons, prison and exile, had put the finishing touch to his fortunes. Solely out of love to his wife and the two children with which they were blessed, Ruggero Altavilla folded his wings; and though he had a right to the title of prince and to a golden heart in his coat of arms, he had contentedly resigned himself to the obscurity of a humble lot; and turning his knowledge of painting, learnt as a pastime in his youth, to account, he made cheap sketches, views of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Cumæ, for picture dealers, who sold them to foreigners for double the money.

In the proper place and at the proper time, the history of Ruggero Altavilla's family and of the lawsuit which ruined him will be related. We must now see why young Corrado could not be contented with merely earning a living, but required to make a

fortune. Corrado was in love, after a noble and thorough-going fashion, according to his nature, like that of all his family, whose motto was the simple Latin adverb, "digne," a sufficiently expressive one.

Corrado's beloved was a pretty girl living in a palazzo in the Via del Nilo, not far from his own modest residence. For some time this near neighbourhood had established friendly relations between the two families—the one *nouveaux riches*, the other decayed nobles. Their friendship had been much strengthened by the circumstance that the Palmanovas, risen from nothing, retained their simple habits, and the Altavillas, in their poverty, displayed that dignity which does not spring from pride, but from a clear conscience and the determination to ask nothing from any one.

However, if any one had told Signor Martino, shipbuilder and merchant, that Corrado Altavilla, of noble descent, but who had failed as a law-student, had presumed to aspire to the hand of his fair Annunziata, he would have jumped from his seat, higher than he would have done if any one had asked him for the loan of seventy thousand lire.

And Corrado, who understood without having ever made the experiment—Corrado, who saw the difficulty, in fact, the impossibility, of gaining his ends with the slender portion fortune had given him, speedily made his calculations like a sensible man: "Nunziata is sixteen and loves me; therefore she may wait three years. I ask no more."

Three years certainly are a short time in which to make one's fortune honestly in any quarter of the

globe. But Corrado had in Lima a relative on his mother's side, and this relative had made his fortune after twenty years of hard work. Why should he not, with his experience and his protection, shorten the years of this painful apprenticeship in the case of his youthful relative? Corrado took with him some good capital—his youthful courage and his determined will; two qualities of little use to him at Naples, where he was obliged to maintain a certain decorum, and where a trade, though willingly learnt by him, would have inflicted a dangerous humiliation, without offering any corresponding advantage.

Moreover, there was the family lawsuit to be won. The right was on their side, but the others had influence and cunning on theirs; and the expected millions were still uncertain.

"There is still time for me to come back with a good pocketful of money," Corrado had said to his father, "to grease the wheels of justice."

In the meantime, you will have guessed why the fair Nunziata kept looking at the handsome sailor, and why she was so melancholy during the party given in her honour. She had not clearly understood why he had resolved on this hasty departure; nor could she, accustomed as she was to see her every wish gratified by her father, imagine that he would have said no, if she had declared her wish to change her name for that of Altavilla. Still, even she had not dared to express this wish to her father. Neither had Corrado dared to run the risk of a refusal which might have destroyed his hopes for ever. And so, partly telling the girl himself, partly leaving it

to his sister, Corrado had let her know the reasons for his departure, and obtained the promise from her which was to give him the courage and faith, so necessary in his great undertaking.

Nunziata promised nothing very serious, young as she was, and an only daughter besides. Indeed, being sixteen, and an only daughter, she had hardly yet begun to dream of marriage. Still, Corrado was her first love. But it was a childish kind of love; and, meeting him during the last two years, she had never lost her sleep on his account, nor experienced any vague ecstasy, any mysterious quickening of her pulse. Corrado pleased her, and this was a good deal; besides, he was Margherita's brother, and this was as much, if not more.

Margherita was her particular friend, beloved, one may say, immediately after, and as much as, her last doll—the most beautiful and best beloved of all. One morning, about three years before the time when this story begins, Nunziata had seen Margherita from the balcony of her little room, while Margherita was standing in front of her window watering her flowers. They had looked at one another and exchanged smiles, such as angels may do, who meet by chance about the world. From that day, Nunziata, who had been struck by Margherita's beauty, and not yet attained to the age when envy eats out the heart of women, used to wait in her balcony for the moment when the pretty apparition should come to the window-sill to water her beloved flowers. Margherita, for her part, looked kindly at the pretty child, with her fair curls, her blue eyes, and her pink and white complexion,

and responded with a little nod to her friendly gestures.

This dumb show went on for a week, when Nunziata gravely told her father that she had made a friend, whom she loved more than her doll, and to whom she intended to pay a visit. Signor Martino at first contented himself with smiling; but when he saw that his little daughter was talking sensibly, and that she was determined to have a friend at all costs, he bethought himself of making inquiries before gratifying this whim. All he heard was excellent; the name of the family was Altavilla—they were noble, but not rich; excellent people, who kept to themselves, were sufficient for themselves, and gave no trouble to any one. Signor Martino gave his consent. Then they had to plan how their acquaintance was to be made. Was it quite necessary that he, with his daughter on his arm, should go round the corner of his palazzo in the Via del Nilo, enter Donna Romita lane, ascend the four flights of stairs leading to the Altavilla habitation, and say to them: "Here I am?" "For my part," Signor Martino said, "I shouldn't mind; but what would the people think of us? Might they not say that you were a little mad woman, and I, a great fool?"

"Don't trouble yourself, papa," replied Nunziata, with the greatest gravity. "I will think about it and let you know."

"That's right; do you think about it, and then let me know."

The girl's promise was no empty boast. Her father gone, she lost no time, and had soon found out the

shortest way. She wrote a little note, and sealed it then she went to the window, and drawing the attention of her future friend in the usual way, showed that she wished to send it to her.

Signor Martino, with all his business-like qualities, could hardly have found out a device like this.

Margherita stood a moment watching the child's pantomime. Then she seemed to call some one, who immediately appeared at the window. This was a handsome boy, who gave a glance at the opposite balcony, listened to the girl for a moment, and then disappeared like lightning. Margherita went to the window, put out her head through the flowers, and looked into the street. Nunziata imitated her, and saw the boy looking up, evidently expecting her, as no sooner had he caught a glimpse of her, than he held out his hands as if he wanted alms. Nunziata understood and dropped her letter, which after many twists and turns, fell into the boy's hands.

Two minutes later, the missive had reached its destination, and Margherita opened it without leaving the window, under the eyes of her small correspondent.

The little note ran thus :—

"You are so beautiful, you must be good. To-morrow, if you have no objection, I shall come with my father to pay you a visit.—Nunziata Palmanova."

When she had read these few words, Margherita raised her eyes, looked at Nunziata, smiled at her, and gave a nod of assent, after which the little girl disappeared. In this way Signor Martino was pledged to pay a formal visit the next day, without any con-

sideration on the part of his daughter as to what engagements he might have made himself.

The friendship between the two girls after this simple beginning had prospered. Margherita was four years older than Nunziata, who was scarcely thirteen. But the daughter of Ruggero Altavilla, leading so lonely and monotonous a life, freely appreciated the pleasure of such a natural affection. And for a year or more no other feeling had a share in this friendship. But at last Margherita perceived that Corrado had fallen in love with the pretty little thing, and a sisterly love had then taken the place of her friendship.

The two families often met, and Signor Martino had never had reason to repent of his amiability; for, after all, the advantage was his. Nunziata had learnt much from her gentle friend, who possessed the natural dignity and exquisite grace which belongs to gentle blood, and from her she received as judicious advice as a mother could have given her.

"What a pity," Signor Martino said to himself, "that such a girl should not have found a husband yet!"

And thinking over it, he began to cogitate a daring design. What if Margherita would occupy a place in his family, vacated many years before, and become a mother to Nunziata? He was not too old for her, though he was forty-five. And then, isn't a man said to be always young? The difficulty wasn't there then. But Signor Martino reflected that his family might increase, and this not without injury to his only daughter. And then, Pluto, the god of riches,

whispered certain things in his ear. The girl had nothing or next to nothing. All the family would end by living on him. In short, he was divided between yes and no, and Signor Palmanova had not yet made up his mind. But as far as Margherita's beauty and discretion went, they were undeniable, and, unfortunately, he was quite sensible of both.

The only result of this feeling was that one day, when Corrado expressed a wish to go to America, Signor Martino forgot his avarice and said: "I have a vessel being laden. If Corrado thinks of going in her as a sailor for form's sake, he mightn't find a better opportunity, because shipowners, when they engage sailors, like them to be good and not for show. But I can do as I like. Corrado will do what he can, give a hand to the steward, attend to the cabin, and this in itself is a sort of apprenticeship. In this world we ought to know how to do a little of everything."

Corrado had joyfully accepted, and with the more eagerness that the offer was not a gift.

They two, the brother and sister, were left alone for one moment on the upper deck. Margherita's eyes were full of tears, but she made an effort and tried to comfort her brother. "My dear Corrado, keep up your heart and be a man. Here we shall be looking out for you—for you alone."

"And you, Nunziata, will you think of the absent?" asked Corrado of his beloved, who had joined them at that moment.

"Here is the pledge," replied Nunziata, with a blush; and coming close to them, she held out a

little packet, which she had just taken from under her cloak.

Corrado put out his hands eagerly for it.

"No, no!" said she, drawing back with a blush; "I consign it to Margherita, and she may make what use she likes of it."

"Nunziata," he muttered, "how cruel you are!"

"No, I am not; but Margherita will be, if she doesn't do with it what I told her."

"I understand," said Margherita; "the best use I can make of your little packet, is to put it in Corrado's hands. Eh, my dear?"

Nunziata looked down, and fled to hide her confusion. But as some of the other guests were standing near, fearing they might remark her heightened colour, Nunziata turned to lean against the side of the vessel, and to gaze at the city spread out before her, glowing in the light of the setting sun.

In the meantime Corrado had taken the little parcel from his sister's hand, and given a hasty look, but one as eager as a miser's, at Nunziata's gift. It was her portrait, and a lock of her fair hair.

He made a superhuman effort not to kiss the lock of silky hair like spun gold, under the eyes of every one; but to guard against the temptation, vowed to do it before long, and proceeded slowly, as if by accident, towards the place where Nunziata was standing.

"Thank you," he murmured, as soon as he was near her; "and you, tell me, won't you accept some memento of me, dear Nunziata?"

"Your portrait?" said she. "I have it; Margherita gave it to me."

"This is something else," replied Corrado; "a little ring—a relic of my mother!"

The girl made no answer, and the expression of her face showed that though she did not like to say yes, she dared not refuse his gift too brusquely.

"Never fear, Nunziata; I don't ask you to engage yourself to me without your father's knowledge. This ring binds me only."

"Oh, it isn't that at all."

"Come then, take it. It is the only keepsake I can give you. And may I not give it to you to remind you sometimes, that all my hope is in you? And don't refuse it, I entreat."

She could make no further resistance, and accepted the small gold ring which Corrado slipped skilfully into her hand, while he seemed to be drawing her attention to something far off in the city.

"Well, Nunziata dear, don't you think it is time to go?"

These, as the readers may easily guess, were the words of Signor Palmanova, who at that moment came up to the two lovers.

"Yes, papa, if you wish it."

"Signor Martino," said Corrado, bowing.

"Ah, is it you, my boy? And so you are taking a last look at your native land?"

"Yes, I was pointing out to Signorina Nunziata that pretty group of houses up there towards Petraio, with the green terraces like the hanging gardens of Babylon. Alas, for at least two months I shall see little green!"

"That's true," remarked Signor Martino, "but

it was your own wish, my boy. And I admire you for it. That's the way to become a man, instead of loitering in some hole or corner, expecting a stroke of luck. I too have seen my share of the world, and was just about your age when I left Naples to begin my apprenticeship. And listen, Corrado; at that time I hadn't money enough to buy a ring for the girl who became my wife afterwards. I had a stout heart and a determined will, and God blessed me, as He will bless you, never fear."

Corrado's heart beat as he listened to Signor Martino's confidences.

"Can he have guessed anything!" he reflected, while he was replying with some unmeaning words to these good wishes.

"Moreover," continued Signor Palmanova, "you may be easy in your mind; your people have friends here. Nunziata loves your Margherita as she would an elder sister; I have the greatest respect for your father, and we are almost, I may say, one family."

Signor Martino had never been so unreserved as he was this day. But then, the solemn leavetaking was an excuse for this affectionate outpouring; the champagne also accounted for some of it, that blessed beverage, which seems like coloured water when you taste it, and then flashes like a ray of sunshine and mounts to your head. At the same time Signor Martino only said what he thought, and nothing more.

"Signor Martino, your words are a comfort to me," said Corrado. "My parting will be less sad when I consider that you remain, a warm and sincere friend to my father and sister. And once more, thank you

for the hospitality you have offered me on board your ship. I feel as if this expedition will bring me luck."

Half an hour later the guests were leaving the deck of the *Nunziata*, and the sailors were preparing to lift the anchors. Signor Palmanova's daughter had got into her boat, after having offered seats to Margherita and her father, who thanked her, but did not accept the invitation.

"We wish to remain here a little, to say a final good-bye to Corrado," Margherita had said.

"And I too should like to remain with you; but what can I do?" replied Nunziata, blushing, with a last look at the young sailor.

Corrado saw her depart, and put his right hand over his heart, pressing against it that lock of golden hair, which henceforth would be the only memento of his beloved, and the only pledge of future happiness—so far off, that he did not venture to calculate the distance.

"Poor dear," said Margherita, coming up to him and throwing her arms round his neck, as she said good-bye; "never fear, she will wait for you, and you will often hear from us."

CHAPTER IV.

DONNA ROMITA.

THE following morning the young Duke of Melito was in his rooms in the Riviera di Chiaia, a small but comfortable bachelor's abode, on the first floor of the Palazzo Caivano, his father's house. The Duke of Melito was the eldest son of the Prince of Caivano. Renato was seated in an easy-chair near the window, where he could breathe the fresh air from the bay, and feast his eyes on the greenery of the Villa. Before him, in an obsequious attitude, stood a man of middle age, with sharp eyes and a vulgar look, something between a confidant and a valet, one of those jack-of-all-trades that abound in large cities generally, and in Naples in particular.

"Then," said Renato, "you have succeeded in finding out something? What is it?"

"Eccellenza, I am sorry to say she is an honest girl."

"How, you are sorry to say?" cried Renato, jump-

ing up. "I didn't ask for your opinion, you villain!"

"Eccellenza, I beg your pardon; but then——"

"Then your business is to give me all the information you were able to collect, and nothing more."

Renato half repented of having applied to this man. On the other hand, he was pleased that the fellow, who had gone in quest of information with that sharpness which is common to all men of his class, had been obliged to return and tell him the first thing: "she is an honest girl." Renato had no doubt of it; but this homage paid to virtue by vice, like that paid to Job by Satan, seemed to him a good omen. Therefore the Duke of Melito made no unnecessary fuss over this indiscreet remark of his confidant, and brought him back to the matter in hand without saying anything more.

"Eccellenza, what I learnt is this: the girl is the daughter of a painter, and she has a brother who started yesterday for America."

"And her surname?"

"Altavilla."

"Altavilla?"

Here Renato did not give a mere jump, he stood straight up.

"Yes, Eccellenza, Altavilla," replied his confidant, looking at him with a silly expression.

"Altavilla! Altavilla!" Renato kept muttering, as he walked, much agitated, up and down his room. "Why this particular name? But after all, what is there strange in that? In Naples there are at least a dozen Altavillas, here and there. If he had said

Caivano. There is only one person who has a right to this name; but Altavilla! Still it is extraordinary! The first to make an impression on me; for there is no use denying it. Well, this girl is an Altavilla. What if Antonio Carafa should be right!"

And Renato came to a standstill, reflecting on what his friend had said. But directly afterwards he felt this a weakness, shrugged his shoulders, and went back to his armchair.

"Well, it is Altavilla; and her own name, do you know it?"

"Yes, Eccellenza, her name is Margherita."

"A pretty name," murmured the Duke of Melito. "And tell me, Gaetano, could you——"

Here he paused, like a man afraid of repenting, and desirous first of weighing the consequences of what he was going to say.

"Eccellenza, I am at your service."

"Nothing, nothing; I have changed my mind. I want nothing more to-day. You may go. This is for your trouble."

"Eccellenza, I am much obliged," said Gaetano, as he pocketed the money.

He withdrew after politely bowing, but thinking in his heart, with little respect, that the Duke of Melito was mad.

Mastro Gaetano had scarcely closed the house-door behind him, when he heard some one running after him. He turned and came to a standstill, as if he had seen the head of Medusa. It was the Prince of Caivano's steward; a tall, thin man, the personification of hunger, with a pale, beardless face, and two

hungry eyes under bristling eyebrows—a startling apparition at first sight. However, appearances are deceptive. He might have been an excellent fellow; and with his black coat, black cravat, showing only a very little bit of linen, and his tall black hat, might have been mistaken for a lawyer—not a prosperous one, I may add.

"Well, Gaetano?"

"At your service, sir."

"You have been with the duke?"

"You saw me coming out?" said Gaetano, who couldn't deny it.

"I saw you, and I wish to know why he sent for you. You were here early this morning, and here you are again; therefore something is going on, is there not?"

Gaetano hesitated before answering.

"You must understand," continued the man in black, "that the prince has a right to know what his son is doing. A father must be vigilant; and I give you warning his arm is long."

Gaetano shrugged his shoulders, and with an expressive motion of his nose and mouth, he replied—

"Keep yourself from evil, and fear no one."

"So much the better; in that case you can have no difficulty in telling me what the duke's business was, especially," pursued the man in black, slipping something into his hand, "with a ducat to loosen your tongue."

"I assure you, Signor Turiello, it was not a loan. That is not my line now—I always lost at it, and the world is full of thieves."

"Then what is it?"

"Well, I can't tell you plainly, because I didn't understand it well myself. The young gentleman sent me to make inquiries about a girl."

"Ah, one of those?"

"No, Signor Turiello; and that's the truth. Do you think I would have anything to do with that?"

"Yes, yes, I know how you occupy yourself. All right. Well, did you go to make inquiries?"

"I went to oblige the young gentleman. He wanted some information for a friend; at least, so he said. Besides, they are respectable people."

"Worse luck!" muttered Signor Turiello.

"Worse luck! And why?"

"I know why. And tell me, was that all?"

"Yes, he let me go directly; therefore I feel the more convinced that it is no concern of his own."

"Hem!" replied Signor Turiello, shaking his head. "As long as there is nothing behind. That will do; you may go about your business. Wait; where does the girl live?"

"There, behind the Gesù Nuovo, close to the Via Nilo. Do you think of going to see for yourself, sir?"

Signor Turiello replied with a grimace, and turned his back on him, to make his way into the Palazzo Caivano, out of which, at that moment, emerged Renato, in correct morning costume.

"Eccellenza, at your service," said Signor Turiello, drawing to one side and taking off his hat, with a bow.

"Good morning, Salvatore; how are you all?"

"Well, Eccellenza, well," replied the man in black, with beaming eyes, "and all anxious to oblige you."

"Thanks, remember me to them all; and to Signora Carmela in particular."

Signora Carmela was the wife of the man in black, and he was the father of two daughters. But Renato was a sensible youth, and made no mention of the daughters as he parted with his father's steward.

Before the evening was over Renato had discovered an apartment in Donna Romita lane, in the very house where that divine apparition of the day before was living; and an hour after, much more plainly dressed than usual, with a beating heart, he mounted those four flights of stairs, which from that day were a sort of Jacob's ladder, leading to paradise, where angels were coming and going.

By this time the reader understands that the ducal coronet was laid aside. Renato, the young Duke of Melito, only son and heir of the Prince of Caivano, had been transformed in a simple Errico di Sarno. Only the preposition, as a sign of nobility, showed that our hero felt some objection to letting himself down too low all at once. Moreover, there was nothing strange in a surname with that "di" before it; and, after all, you can imagine that he did not wish to appear quite plebeian before people called Altavilla, and undoubtedly of Norman descent—Altavillas, with men among them called Corrado and Ruggero, and ladies called Margherita, royal Norman and royal Angevin.

Renato's landlady, Signora Concetta, the widow of an old officer, was in the habit of letting her room to young university students, and was only too glad to secure a lodger now that it was vacant; and she

soon began to consider him a model lodger—one who gave no trouble, was regular in his habits, studious, and always scrupulously polite towards herself. She soon began to praise him to her neighbours; but for all this success with his landlady, Renato did not succeed in making the acquaintance of Margherita or her father.

Signora Concetta, however, was not long before she carried to Signor Ruggero and his daughter the report of the handsome student who read and wrote ten hours a day, who talked like an angel, and grew the most beautiful flowers in the world on his window-sill.

This praise was certainly exaggerated; for all these beautiful flowers consisted of a fuchsia, a gardenia, a couple of pelargoniums, and a plant of stephanotis, trained to climb up the sides of the window to gratify his neighbour on the fifth storey with its delicious odour, a combination of jessamine and honey. But Signora Concetta, accustomed to the commonest violets and stocks, might reasonably think that Errico di Sarno's were the most beautiful and precious flowers in the world.

Errico di Sarno risked great hopes on this display of flowers, rightly thinking that they would attract the attention of his lovely neighbour, if she happened to look out from the balcony.

For a whole week our hero's days were all spent in that modest apartment, or in the streets leading to Donna Romita lane, except the hours of breakfast and dinner, when Errico di Sarno became Renato, Duke of Melito again, the eldest son of the Prince of

Caivano. Even his nights he spent sleeping and dreaming there, on a sort of mystic Jacob's ladder. Not all, however, to his great grief; for people cannot always be away from their home, when they have the misfortune to possess one. The prince certainly went to bed a little after ten, and thought no more of his son, who had his own rooms, and who, after all, might be at the theatre, or at the Casino dell' Unione, near the Palazzo Reale, where he usually remained till three in the morning. Still, Renato had to sleep at home sometimes, to avoid remarks.

From whom? From Signor Turiello especially, who from time to time came to look for him in his own rooms at an early hour, with one excuse or another. Signor Turiello had two marriageable daughters, and in their father's eyes they were beautiful. Renato, too, himself had admired them; and from that day their father, encouraged by certain examples in the Caivano family, had determined that one of them should become Duchess of Melito, and afterwards Princess of Caivano.

The siege had begun long ago. Every New Year's Day, and every family anniversary, there was a shower of gifts, and Renato's little drawing-room was full of pretty trifles, by which the pretty daughters of Signor Turiello had tried to show their skill and good taste. Nor, on their father's part, were invitations wanting, judiciously given to the duke, who, however, did not regard them much, nor was he able to guess their object. After all, how could he imagine that Signor Turiello was ambitious enough to wish to have him for a son-in-law.

Let us return to Signor Turiello and his visits at early hours. Renato's servant could not tell him every time that his master had gone out early to ride when the horse was standing in the stable, or to hunt when it was not the season. From time to time he had to be under the paternal roof and bear patiently with the worthy but tiresome steward, or with any other of the hundred enemies whom every man at his birth inherits from fate. And these mornings the Duke of Melito made a great show and display of his being at home ; then, as soon as he could slip away, he was off like an arrow to his post of observation. And there Errico di Sarno invented some story for Signora Concetta, who replied invariably—

" Poor boy, even working at night ! "

One of these mornings she made his heart beat as she said to him—

" Signor Errico, forgive me, I stole something from you to-day."

" Stole ! And what ? "

" And what's more, a stranger has been in your room."

" In your company, I hope ! There is no harm in that," replied Renato, who was beginning to feel uncomfortable ; for his heart, throbbing violently at the time, told him, that in this novel proceeding on the part of his landlady, his lovely neighbour had some share more or less.

" Thank you," replied Signora Concetta, in the meantime ; " I told the young lady that, with me, she could go anywhere, while you were not at home."

These last words were not gratifying to Renato.

On the contrary, he would like to have been at home to do the honours of his room to the angel on the fifth storey. But then, if he had been, Signora Concetta would never have thought of bringing her there; and she, probably, would have fled like a frightened deer.

It appeared that during Renato's absence Margherita had called upon Signora Concetta to return a picture—said to be by Salvator Rosa—which the landlady had lent Ruggero Altavilla to copy. Their conversation had turned on Renato's flowers, and Signora Concetta had invited the girl to take a peep into her lodger's room; she had even broken off a bit of stephanotis for Margherita to carry away.

"Ah! Signor Errico," continued the old woman, "the young lady sleeps every night with her window open to enjoy the scent of your flowers; and I believe she would like to follow your example and put another plant in her little balcony."

"I should be happy to offer her one of mine," said Renato, hesitatingly.

"So I told her," continued Signora Concetta; "but the dear child would not hear of it; she would hardly take that little bit though I forced it upon her. But now she can show it to some gardener and buy a little plant if she can find one."

"Since she will not accept one of mine," said Renato, "I can at least write down its name on a bit of card for you to give her."

So saying, he went to his desk and wrote down "Stephanotis floribunda," putting a world of meaning into these two words.

From that day the Duke of Melito began life under a better aspect. He had a grand plan, and it was on the road to accomplishment. The odours of his flowers had got him into Margherita's good graces. He was like an actor in the old-fashioned tragedy—who only appears in the second act after the minor characters have carefully prepared the way. But much yet remained to be done. How was he to get a direct introduction to Margherita ?

CHAPTER V.

A SUNBEAM.

EVERY one knows that lovers have their own particular star, like the Three Wise Men on their way to Bethlehem; and at last the day came when the lover's star rose for Errico di Sarno.

One day Signora Concetta went to Vomero to visit a relation of hers for a little change of scene. The sun was scorching as usual on that volcanic soil; Signora Concetta got a chill after the heat; she returned to her own house more dead than alive, and so feverish that she was only just able to get into bed.

After getting up early as usual one morning, Renato was for some time busied with his books and flowers, not without reckoning by the throbbings of his heart the footsteps of his lovely neighbour upstairs. In the meantime the hour for his coffee had struck, and there was no sign of Signora Concetta and her tray with the smoking coffee. Worse still; some one had knocked twice at the house-door, and Renato, with his usual courtesy, wishing to oblige his old landlady,

had gone himself to let in the woman that Signora Concetta employed to do her marketing for her, and to wash and brush the house. These two circumstances, sufficiently strange from their novelty, attracted his attention.

"Go and look after your mistress," he said to the servant. "She can't be well this morning, for I have not seen her yet."

In a few minutes the servant came back in alarm.

"Signora Concetta is ill, very ill. Come, Signor Errico, come and see her. She is as red as she can be, and she looks at me so; and I can't understand a word she says."

Renato hastened after her, and when he reached his landlady's bed he found her quite feverish, and gathered from her broken sentences, that she had felt herself ill the evening before on her return to the city.

"Don't be alarmed, Signora Concetta," he said; "it is the effects of the heat. I shall go for a doctor and be back directly."

Accordingly he fetched his hat and departed in haste. He went into the first doctor's shop he came to, summoned the doctor, and conducted him to the old lady's bedside.

"It is nothing," said the disciple of Esculapius, after making his investigations; "it is incipient encefalitus, brought on by the strong sun. I must bleed her, and apply cloths dipped in a decoction of elder flowers, and then we shall see."

No invalid was ever better nursed than Signora Concetta, during the first two days of her illness.

The doctor's visits, morning and evening ; the servant, who never was to leave her, except to attend to the necessary work of the house ; Renato, who was always there, night and day, except a few hours at breakfast and dinner-time, spent at home ; and to crown all, on the second day of her illness, a new guardian angel descended from heaven or thereabouts—for as such the fifth storey, when compared with the fourth, might be considered.

Renato was in the house, in Signora Concetta's very room, when this angel appeared. Only, as he had sat up all night, and had not gone out to take a mouthful of air, the poor fellow had yielded to weariness, and was dozing in a corner. The stiffness of his crossed arms, made him at last waken with a start ; and perhaps some internal voice made itself heard, bidding him awake, and see the bright eyes now in the room.

" Signora—Signorina—" he stammered, as he made a bow ; " please excuse me—I was asleep."

The confession was certainly superfluous, but just then the Duke of Melito could find no other words.

" Signor di Sarno ?" said Margherita, for she it was.

" Yes, Signorina. And my insignificant name was known to you ?"

" You need not wonder," the girl replied. " Signora Concetta has talked so much about you. And then, after all the care you have given our good landlady, she had some reason to praise you. We, on the contrary, are to blame, for it was only this morning that we heard of her illness."

" It is nothing serious," he hastened to say, not to

agitate the invalid, who was watching them with wide-open eyes.

"Yes, so the doctor told me just now when we met him on the stairs—my father and I. But it isn't fair that you should have all the trouble, Signor di Sarno. From this day we shall share the pleasant task of nursing our friend here."

"What is that, Signorina? I certainly should not be so wanting in courtesy as to allow a young lady to sit up at night, while I——"

"Well, let us arrange it in this way," interrupted Margherita, assuming at once that courteous sort of intimacy, which the circumstances permitted. "You will sit up during the night; I shall come early to relieve you; then you can go and lie down. Please, let us do something."

"Thank you, Signorina," he replied, with a bow.

"Then let us begin."

"What, at once?"

"But you have been sitting up all night?"

"Yes, but I am not sleepy now. I believe I slept two hours, and that is enough. However," he added, not to seem as if he wished to persist in remaining, "since you are so kind as to stay for a few hours, I shall go and take a little air. Signora Concetta——"

With these words, Renato approached the bed, gently to feel the patient's pulse. This is a weakness of all amateurs, liking to feel sick people's pulses, and our hero was not above it.

"I have not introduced you to Signorina Margherita Altavilla," said the old lady, trying to smile.

"We introduced ourselves," replied Renato; "are

we not all friends of yours? And is it not natural that we should understand one another, without so much ceremony?"

Margherita too had come to the other side of the bed, and was arranging the sheet round the old lady's scraggy neck.

"Signor Errico has a heart of gold," said Signora Concetta, turning her eyes towards Margherita.

At these words Renato blushed, in fact gave a start. Margherita might think that this was from modesty. "Heart of gold!" he repeated to himself. "One would think my landlady was gifted with second sight!"

And after a few farewell words he departed to take a mouthful of air, as he said himself, but in reality to run home to make his appearance at breakfast.

The consequence of the compact entered into by Margherita and Renato was, that they saw little of one another during the day. But every morning, at the hour of relieving guard, the two young people exchanged some complimentary words, while they compared notes as to the state of the patient, and gradually, you may imagine, these conversations became longer, always for the sake of Signora Concetta, who, seeing them so nice and good-looking, could not help thinking that God had made them expressly for the purpose of uniting them, and that they had no idea of opposing the divine decree.

One morning, Renato, after an expedition to his room, returned with a bunch of flowers and offered them to Margherita.

"They are from my hanging garden, Signorina, and I hope you will like them."

Margherita accepted them readily with that quiet grace which she showed in everything. During these flying encounters an intimacy had sprung up between them, testifying to their mutual esteem, and to the pleasure they took in each other's company. Renato had not said one specially eager word, or indulged in any except the most ordinary conversation, and perhaps, if it had been otherwise, she might have taken alarm, to the great loss of these short conversations. Signora Concetta's attack was passing off, and I must say that both, without knowing it, wished it prolonged. Therefore, might not Margherita become suspicious, and change the hour of her coming? "Take care!" said Renato to himself. "The doctor says Signora Concetta is now out of danger, and I have no wish to see her lovely nurse say good-bye." Still, the old lady showed no signs of convalescence yet. The bleeding had weakened her; moreover, in her room the sun never shone, and Signora Concetta did not belong to the order of cotyledonous plants which flourish in darkness.

Renato, therefore, made up his mind that she should have his room, where there was more light and air.

"But you, Signor Errico?"

"I am not ill; any place will do for me."

Margherita too, when consulted, approved of Signor Errico's plan, and between them they carried Signora Concetta to his room.

The poor old lady gave a sigh of contentment. That bright light refreshed her, all the flowers in the window delighted her eyes, and the air was filled with

their fragrance. Renato had put as many as he could on the window-sill, and those on brackets in the window recess, blending with the others, produced the effect of a small shrubbery. Signora Concetta, who in her youth had read "La Gerusalemme Liberate," was reminded directly of the gardens of Armida.

The three formed a pretty domestic picture during the warm hours of the day. For Renato, who no longer sat up at night, and only rose early to open the door for Margherita, as soon as he had paid his visit to his home, came back at once to his nest in Donna Romita, and usually remained there till dinner-time.

Signora Concetta, on a sofa, with her face turned to the light, was busy with her knitting. Margherita was sitting in the window near the flowers, with the sun shining through the round pelargonium leaves on her rich dark hair, hair that Renato would fain have wound round his temples like a coronet. Just now he was seated at some little distance, on the other side of his old landlady, and feasting his eyes on Margherita's wonderful loveliness. And as he looked at her, he reflected that this girl, reared in a garret, was worthy to dwell in a palace or a temple; and this queen, this divine creature, had been found, almost discovered by him.

Yes, the Duke of Melito was in love. But how was he to make her his own? How overcome the natural objections of the Prince of Caivano? How was he to keep up that apocryphal name of Errico di Sarno? The plot was beginning to thicken, and Renato had no idea where to find the clue.

"My dears," said the Signora, breaking the silence, "you are sacrificing yourselves to me. Especially you, Signor Errico."

"What do you mean, Signora? I was never better in my life."

And he gave a furtive glance at Margherita, whose head was bent thoughtfully over her work, as if she was counting every stitch. Then he thought he saw her pretty head shake a little, and hoped that his words had taken effect.

"But all this time," proceeded the Signora, on whom these trifles were lost, "all this time you can't read."

"Ah well, where's the harm?" he replied, smiling. "Why read? To be of use to one's self? Is it not better, when it is possible, to be of use to other people?"

"How nice of you, Signor Errico!" exclaimed Margherita, raising her head, and looking at him with her honest eyes, as if she wanted to thank him for his courtesy.

Renato looked down in embarrassment, fearing she might have read his secret, plainer and more legibly than the famous handwriting on the wall at Belshazzar's feast. The sweet sound of her words made him wish that his name really was Errico, and he felt jealous of all the thousands bearing a name so sweet on her lips!

"Besides," he continued, trying to overcome himself, "am I not studying here? Have I not a book in my hands?"

"Ah yes, that's true," replied the Signora; "and what are you reading?"

"Stupid stuff, Signora."

"Why stupid, if it is one of your studies?" put in Margherita. "You might let us hear what you are reading."

"Signorina, do you feel inclined for a course of history, may I ask?"

"Why not? You might grow weary of reading aloud before we grew weary of listening to you."

"I am not so sure. The audience is so—— However, if you like, let us begin to-morrow."

"No time like the present."

"All right, then. But as this is the history of one particular country—let us say our own—in short, you can't read the history of one country with profit, without having a general idea of the history of other countries. Suppose, then, to-day I were to give you a slight sketch of universal history, what do you think?"

"Excellent! You will begin then with a short description of the face of the earth. Before the characters appear we should see the stage."

"Certainly, let us see the stage. Then you wish me to give you a description of the face of the globe. Well, I am but a second-rate professor! But as you don't pay me——"

"And who said we should not pay you?"

"When—when I consider my claims——"

"Leave that to us. You will be rewarded according to your deserts."

"Ah, Signorina," he ventured to say; "how I wish the day of my pension had come."

It was Margherita's doing that the conversation

had drifted into this playful style, guided by that fine sixth sense peculiar to women, who feel some kinds of silence as dangerous as some kinds of calm are to sailors.

But that arrow of Renato's went rather too direct. However, he said it jestingly, and Margherita answered in the same style.

"A retiring pension?"

"No, Signorina; for incapacity."

Margherita smiled. "You have a good way to go before you come to that," she said, "and perhaps you will tire by the way. Come then," she added, promptly, not to give him time to break in with one of his usual compliments, "let us not lose this opportunity, and please begin."

Renato nodded and set about his improvised address. He would like to have begun with chaos, or rather with Laplace's famous theory about the igneous vapoury, incandescent mass, afterwards to become our solar system, and of the rings of cosmical matter, which were gradually detached to form the planets; then, borrowing a leaf from the geologists and palæontologists, to discourse on the formation of mountains, on the successive appearance of vital forms, and their genealogical ramifications from the first faint signs of life up to the unlucky seed of Adam. But he remembered opportunely, "be wise as serpents," and abstained from those vast scientific deductions however indispensable to history they seemed to him.

Instead, he began with the time when men were already divided into families, with their own settle-

ments and mythologies, and drew a picture of contemporaneous peoples, already somewhat civilised in Asia and still savage in Europe and elsewhere; then civilised in Europe relapsing into barbarism in Asia and Africa, and savages in America and in Australia, not as yet discovered. Then, turning back a few thousand years, he alarmed Signora Concetta with the savage grandeur and pomp of the Oriental monarchies, one of which still exists in China, with a civilisation all its own, and a wealth of arts and industry which had nothing in common with the descendants of the people who migrated from the lofty plateau in the interior of Asia, to civilise Europe and the whole world by means of those two majestic Pelasgic streams—the Greek and the Italian.

Renato certainly dealt a little too much on the Pelasgians, and must have lost himself in the meeting with Cadmus's Egyptian current, for Signora Concetta fell asleep. "See," he said, stopping suddenly; "I am wearying you. The Signora has given way under the weight of my erudition."

"Poor thing, you see, she is only recovering. But I am not sleeping."

"You, of course, are well," he replied; "but are you not afraid if I continue in this style."

"You needn't fear, Signor Errico, and if you think I am not an unpromising scholar——"

"I will certainly go on," he interrupted, eagerly.

The lecture on universal history was continued till the hour when Signorina Margherita was obliged to go to prepare dinner.

But before taking leave for that day, she thanked

Renato, and expressed a wish for another lesson on the following one.

"Blessed Saint Jamarius!" exclaimed Signora Concetta, clasping her hands; "how learned you are, Signor Errico! Does your head not swim, with all those names of strange people. Mine is reeling, what with Medici, Prussians, Finisci, and so on."

This was the old landlady's version of Medes, Persians, Phœnicians, and Pelasgians. Evidently history was not in her line. And indeed it was not for her that Renato prepared his strong meat.

The lectures were continued every day, to Margherita's delight, while the Signora dozed contentedly. The old lady made no pretence, and never meddled with the mysteries of the professor, who, for his part, asked nothing better than to run through the paths of history with the pretty Margherita for a companion.

The girl heard him eagerly, and sometimes, attracted by an important episode, she even left off working to follow the narrative better. This happened most frequently when they came to the history of Naples, and when after the Cumæeans, Oscans, Romans, and the slothful Capua, he came down to the Normans, Swabians, Angevins, and the kings of the House of Aragon. Margherita then fastened her lovely eyes on Renato's face, and listened to him breathlessly. But just at the same time he began to lose the thread of his discourse and to get confused; there was such marvellous beauty and expression in those eyes, that forehead was so exquisitely formed, and her cheeks so delicately coloured, that the professor grew confused, and like an unskilled boatman, flourished his oars without making much way.

CHAPTER VI.

HEART OF IRON AND HEART OF GOLD.

WHENEVER Renato lost the thread of his discourse in this way, Margherita quickly found a remedy, by quietly withdrawing her eyes and going on with her work. The professor recovered himself, shook his head like a bird in the hedge after a shower, and continued his flight into the regions of the past.

To make clear to her the history of Naples, which, among the histories of the different states of Italy, is the most varied and consequently the most complicated of all, Renato had made a selection of some special portions. And, having arrived at the subject of surnames about the beginning of the twelfth century, he was discoursing upon those great families that, under the Norman, Swabian, Angevin, and Aragonese kings, had distinguished themselves most in arms and in the public service.

In this way they had drifted into heraldry, and Renato in a few words explained the meaning of coats-of-arms on shields, and described the points of an

escutcheon, the partition lines, canting or allusive arms, arms paternal, arms of patronage, arms of succession, and arms of concession.

"Tell me, Signor Errico," asked Margherita, at a certain point, "whose coat-of-arms bears a golden heart?"

This question made Renato's colour deepen; he was quite unprepared for it. But the girl did not perceive his confusion, as her eyes were fixed on her work.

"Signorina, I cannot—" he stammered; "what golden heart do you mean?"

"I don't know. Is there not among the Neapolitan nobility one family bearing a golden heart?"

"Yes, the family of the Prince—no, I am wrong; it is the Altavilla family. By the bye, now I think of it, you are an Altavilla yourself!"

"It is true," she said, reddening in her turn; "but I don't pretend."

"And why not, Signorina? The Altavillas are of Norman descent of the eleventh century."

"So many names resemble one another!" observed Margherita.

"Yes; and there really are many branches of the Altavillas. But you see, Signorina, it is a distinguished name, and all the bearers of it must be descended from Guglielmo Altavilla, surnamed the Iron Arm."

"You are determined to make me out a Norman."

"Noble at least, your appearance vouches for that."

"Thank you; and you too are noble, are you not, Signor Errico?"

"I—no," he replied, disconcerted.

"Well, your appearance too says the contrary," replied she, laughing.

"I am worsted with my own arms," said Renato, with a bow.

"Then pay your ransom, and tell me the story of the golden heart."

"Excuse me, but how do you know about the golden heart, if you are not noble?"

It was now Margherita's turn to look confused. But women have nimble wits, and can always find some loophole.

"Am I not an Altavilla?" replied she, in the jesting tone usual between them. "And may a plebeian Altavilla not have the innocent curiosity of knowing the story of the Altavillas who were barons and bore a golden heart on their shields?"

"Of course," said Renato; "and an iron heart too, for this also they bore on their shields. I mean, of course, one branch of the Altavillas, severed from the parent stem in this thirteenth century, and this branch belonged to the Swabian party. Those Altavillas have a golden heart in the fesse, or if you like it better the centre, of an azure field; and the chief the same, with a spread eagle black, and its claws, beak, and crown of gold."

"The chief," repeated Margherita, puzzled by the expression.

"Yes; imagine the shield divided into two, by a horizontal line cutting off two-thirds of it. The lower part is the field properly so called, containing the arms of the family; the upper part is an addition,

and it is called the chief, which is the first of all the points known in blazonry. Well, the chief is the grant of the emperor, as feudal lord. The Altavillas received it from Frederick the Second. And then, in place of a golden heart, they bore an iron one, an allusion to their constancy and firmness in all warlike undertakings. To the present day they bear an iron heart, but this is the distinctive mark of the younger branches."

"How strange!" Margherita remarked.

"Yes, it is strange; but the origin of it is creditable, and to the honour of the Altavillas, whose name you bear. I shall tell it to you!"

"How much you know, Signor Errico!" she exclaimed. "Without intending it, I am no better than Signora Concetta; but indeed, it is wonderful to hear you."

"Signorina, you are too kind. I always delighted in history, that's all. Shall I tell you the origin of the golden heart?"

"Do; I should like to hear it."

"So you shall. I may omit the story of the Altavillas of the iron heart under the Swabians and Angevins, and come straight to the time of the House of Aragon. Do you approve?"

"Just as you like. Then we are in the time of the Aragons; so you may proceed."

"It was in the year 1494, when the empty-headed Charles VIII. of France, as heir to the antiquated claims of the House of Anjou to the kingdom of Naples, proposed setting forth to conquer it. His wisest counsellors were against it, but the event justified the

foolish ones, for he succeeded easily. The king, with the flower of the French nobility, with a good train of artillery and large bodies of Swiss, descended from the Alps into Lombardy, and proceeded towards Florence.

"Alfonso II. of Aragon then reigned in Naples, and the monarch, deserted by his ally, Alexander Borgia, soon resigned his kingdom into the hands of his son Ferdinand. The French troops were besieging Capua, when the young king, who had only the day before left that town for Naples, found the French banners flying from the walls on his return. A few gentlemen had remained faithful to him; and among them Renato Altavilla, Duke of Melito.

"'Do I see right, Altavilla?' he asked of this nobleman, who was riding behind him.

"'Sire, it is certainly the French colours that you see. But perhaps only the commandant of the castle is a traitor, and the town may not yet be in the enemy's hands. Sire, allow me to go and reconnoitre,' replied the faithful Altavilla.

"With the king's consent, he spurred his horse to the gates of Capua. In half an hour he returned to the king.

"'Well?' asked Ferdinand, who already read the answer in his officer's disappointed face.

"'Sire, all is over; Capua has regretted its oath of fidelity, the soldiers were overpowered by the populace, and at this moment the French horsemen are entering the city.'

"'For the good of Capua, I hope,' said the king, with a sigh. 'Let us return to Naples, gentlemen.'

"So saying, he turned his horse's head, and the gentlemen of his escort did the same.

"Arriving in Naples the same day, Ferdinand convoked in the Piazza di Castel Nuovo the barons of the kingdom and the notables of the city. Renato Altavilla had already guessed, from the king's silence, that he had determined to yield to fate; and, descending from the castle to the harbour, he gave orders that all the boats there should be got ready for sea. In the meantime, the king, hearing that the citizens were desirous of following the example of Capua, and proposed sending ambassadors to the French camp, hastened to carry out his plan; and there, under those walls of Castel Nuovo, which the Angevin had built, he released the nobles and people from their oath of allegiance, so recently sworn; and did it in words so noble, that many hearing him could not restrain their tears.

"It was a final homage to Ferdinand II. of Aragon, under whose very eyes the populace departed tumultuously hurrahing for the French, and breaking into the stables at Castel Nuovo. And worse might have ensued, if the Marquis of Pescara, with the help of a few faithful soldiers, had not hastened to drive them out and to raise the drawbridges, determined to make a final stand against the French.

"'It will be the first resistance they have met with since crossing the Alps!' exclaimed the king, in a melancholy tone, as he retired within the trusty walls of the Angevin rock.

"Three gentlemen accompanied him, in addition to the Marquis of Pescara. But these were Neapolitans,

and Pescara was Spanish. Moreover, these three remained with King Ferdinand because Charles VIII. had deprived them of their estates, to bestow them on his Grand Constable, Monsiegneur d'Aubigny.

"'Renato,' said the king, turning to Altavilla, 'you are free to go. I have no longer a kingdom; and I must seek my fortune like the poorest among the cadets of Normandy.'

"As Altavilla did not move, and indeed signified by gesture that he intended to remain, Ferdinand continued in a melancholy tone—

"'Don't you see? They have all remained behind, all my barons, to do homage to France. The princes of Salerno and Bisignano; the dukes of Melfi, Gravina, and Sora; the counts of Montorio, Atripalda, Celano, and Fondi; the marchise di Venafro, the Caldora, Maddaloni, Margliani—all are there, to do homage to the rising sun. Why should you, Duke of Melito, remain with a poor John Lackland?'

"'Sire, better with you without land than with all the kings of France put together. And then your grandmother and her daughter, the lovely Princess Joanna, they will require faithful attendants to escort them. What will they say in Aragon if no one accompanies them? That in the kingdom of Naples the race of gentlemen is become extinct.'

"King Ferdinand took the Duke of Melito's hand in both of his, and gave it a hearty squeeze, while his eyes filled with tears.

"'Altavilla of the Iron Heart!' he exclaimed, shaking his hand. 'Why Iron Heart? Golden Heart it should be. And, by my faith, I will change your

device, Renato. Come, then, and share my fate. Truly, I have reigned so short a time that I do not seem to deserve such sincere devotion. But I swear to you, Renato, I thank the Lord God for the chastisement he has inflicted on me, because it has given me the opportunity of becoming acquainted with a heart so noble as yours.'

"Charles VIII. entered Naples in the midst of the acclamations of the nobles and people, the 22nd of February, 1495; and Ferdinand II. having lost all hopes of recovering his kindom, quitted Ischia, where he had taken refuge on leaving Naples, and passed into Sicily, accompanied by the faithful Altavilla. But the French were not long in losing all that they had so rapidly won. Their insolence and rapacity soon disgusted the Italian nobility and alienated the populace. Ferdinand of Aragon took up arms against the French king, and Gonsalvo di Cordova, the Grand Captain, landed in Calabria. By July, 1495, he had returned to his capital amidst shouts of joy; and in the midst of his triumph did not forget the faithful Altavilla, who had remained true to him in all his misfortunes.

"One of the first decrees of the restored king was that the Duke of Melito and all his heirs should exchange the iron heart, which for three hundred years the Altavillas had borne on their shield, for a golden one, as a lasting memorial of their fidelity. And I can tell you, Signorina, many envied the Duke of Melito this small favour more than the offices of Grand Constable or Grand Seneschal which fell to other claimants."

Margherita, who for some little time had left off working that she might listen the better, was much pleased with this ending.

"King Ferdinand," she said, "acted with great delicacy. Lands and appointments would have spoilt that mark of respect from a king to the most faithful of his subjects. He must have been a good king, this Ferdinand II.!"

"Yes; and he died young," replied Renato, "in his twenty-eighth year, at the very beginning of the second year of his reign."

"And Renato Altavilla?"

"After the king had died in his arms, he retired from court, and went with his family to spend the remainder of his days in his castle, in a remote part of Calabria."

"Good!" exclaimed Margherita; "I admire that constancy in the Duke of Melito more than the noblest feats of arms. The use of arms is too often a sanguinary and cruel instinct; but constancy of feelings and fidelity during misfortunes are the signs of a lofty mind."

Renato was struck with admiration, and speaking in this fashion, the girl was almost transfigured as he looked at her. The expression of her face was so beautiful, and there was such a fire in her eye, he was nearly falling on his knees before her. Certainly he would have done it, if, instead of living in the nineteenth century, they had found themselves together in a feudal castle four or five centuries earlier.

Still, though keeping his seat, he could not help

saying in a tone that awoke Signora Concetta from her usual nap—

"And you, might you not be an Altavilla of the Golden Heart?"

"Of the Iron Heart, if any," replied Margherita, with a smile; "for Altavillas of the Golden Heart exist still." And she smothered a sigh.

Renato had a glimpse of a world of things. Was not his meeting an Altavilla in this way the work of destiny, of that destiny which he had invoked? Was not this love under exceptional conditions such as he had longed for? And had he really encountered one of his own family?

The thing was, after all, by no means impossible. In his boyhood he had heard at home of a long lawsuit with certain Altavillas who laid claim to the titles and property of the Prince of Caivano. The particulars had escaped him, but the circumstance itself he remembered. Therefore there were still Altavillas, possibly descended from the same ancestor. And this wonderful girl was an Altavilla, without a doubt. That refined beauty, that noble feeling showed that she was of good family. And, as we all have our weaknesses, this flattered the self-love of the Duke of Melito.

What a pleasure it would be to prove that Margherita was nobly born! To go in search of old parchments. To go from name to name in baptismal registers, till he had traced her up to his own family! Every one knows how much we wish to do honour to the lady of our affections. The Christian legend of the coronation of the Virgin, which Antonio Allegri

has so splendidly illustrated in the dome of the cathedral at Parma, testifies to this sentiment, invests it with all possible solemnity, and raises it to the sanctity of an article of faith.

But let me stop before mounting into the clouds, like Renato, with the lovely Margherita before him.

"Excuse me, Signor Errico," she returned, after a pause; "I am going to ask you a question; perhaps an indiscreet one."

"Ask a thousand if you like, Signorina," he said, eagerly.

"Are you a lawyer?"

"I? Yes and no."

"How yes and no? What mystery is that?"

"Legal mysteries, Signorina. I have studied law, and I am a doctor, with a right 'ubicumque terrarum in posterum consulendi, digne jure publico privatoque respondendi, hic non judicandi jurisque dicundi.' And yet I am not a lawyer, as I have neither practised nor taken the oaths."

"What a pity! with all your learning——"

"Signorina!"

"No, let me speak. I am an only daughter, and my dear father has spoiled me a little. I always say what I think. What a pity that, with all your learning and eloquence, you don't practise!"

"Ah, Signorina! neither talent nor eloquence, supposing I possessed them, could ensure me success in this line. Something else is necessary, which I need not explain to you. Besides, like many others, I studied law with the purpose of becoming a lawyer;

but accident, or, more exactly, certain family misfortunes, clipped my wings."

The Duke of Melito told his lie and turned as red as a peony. But, as he had no evil intention, he perhaps may claim forgiveness on this ground.

"But, Signorina," he added, "if you require a counsellor, I am at your service."

"Ah, she will require one indeed!" exclaimed Signora Concetta.

"Really!" inquired Renato.

Signora Concetta was going to tell all she knew; but a gesture of Margherita's stopped her.

"It is possible," Margherita said, as if to cover her interruption. "We certainly have papers—and if my father required your advice——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Renato, with effusion, "I should be the happiest of men."

The stately, Spanish style of conversation usual in Naples is such that Signora Concetta scarcely remarked Renato's ardour. But Margherita was by no means insensible to it, for her confusion was extreme, and her face became

"The colour of a living flame."

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE FIFTH FLOOR.

"MARGHERITA, you don't care for me any longer."

"Foolish child! and why do you say that?"

"Why, you say? Because you are so naughty. You don't come to see me once in a year."

"A fortnight ago."

"And what is that? Then I never see you at the window."

"Every day."

"Yes, every morning for two minutes; that's all!"

This dialogue took place, as the reader has already guessed, between Margherita Altavilla and Nunziata Palmanova. The two girls, the dark and the fair, were in the little room belonging to the former, a pretty nest which, later on, we shall have leisure to admire.

Signor Martino had accompanied his daughter to pay a visit to her young friend, and very willingly too, as the state of his feelings towards her had not

altered. After paying his respects to Margherita, Signor Palmanova had remained behind to talk to Signor Ruggero—not the same thing, by any means. But the fault lay with his daughter, who, like all girls, enjoyed prattling at her ease, and had carried off Margherita: some little thing, a bit of embroidery or a flower—there is always some excuse; and the girls had disappeared from the room which served Signor Ruggero as sitting-room and studio.

"Nunziata dear," said Margherita, in reply to the last speech of her punctilious friend, "you know I have a great deal to do."

"Oh, I know; but you had always plenty to do. When I came into the balcony I used always to see you here, at your window. See, even your chair isn't there. I used to see you with your head bent over your frame—by the way, your frame, where is it gone to? I don't see it anywhere either."

Nunziata, though soft and careless apparently, would have made a fine inspector. Her blue eyes saw better and quicker than those of an eagle.

"The frame?" repeated Margherita. "Ah, yes, I left it downstairs."

"Downstairs! Where? What novelty is this?"

"Dear Nunziata, what do you mean? A poor neighbour of ours is ill, and I went to sit a little with her. Was there any harm?"

"No," replied Nunziata; "it is one of the rules of the Church to visit the sick. But where is this neighbour?"

"Here, below us."

"Ah, that window with all the flowers; is that

hers? Horrid window! I can only see a little bit, a corner of it, because that bit of roof there cuts off the view. And you must have a neighbour! But why desert me? Nice things, Signorina, very nice."

"Come, Nunziata; don't be unfair. Didn't you say yourself, just now, that it is one of the rules——"

"Yes; but you can do both. There are twenty-four hours in the day. Allowing for the hours in bed," said Nunziata, willing to give in a little, "still eighteen remain; and you only give me two minutes."

Margherita smiled.

"You horrid thing! and you are laughing again. Tell me, do you care for me still?"

"Of course, my dear child, of course," replied Margherita, kissing her.

Still Nunziata was not a bit contented. Even the kiss was not to her mind.

"Look here," she said, "you never used to kiss me like that! No, no, you are not the old Margherita any more. Tell me, has anything happened to grieve you?"

"No, nothing more than what grieved me a fortnight ago. You know, Nunziatina, I am thinking about Corrado; about Corrado, and you have never asked me a word about him. If he only knew it!"

"You are right," said Nunziata; "I was angry with you, and I wanted to show it a little, and give you a bit of my mind. But when I think of you, don't I think of Corrado? Isn't it all the same?"

"Well, I don't see that," replied Margherita; "I am one, and Corrado is another."

"Well, then, how is he? When did he write? and

from where? I asked papa twice about it, because, you know, your brother promised to write to papa too; and he told me that he had heard nothing. Now I haven't courage to ask him again."

"Corrado wrote last from the Cape de Verde Islands, and by this time he has crossed the Atlantic; and in his last letter, as well as in all the others, he asked particularly about you, and wanted to know——"

"What?"

"If you still thought a little of an absent friend. You know, Nunziata, he thought of nothing else but you."

"Poor Corrado! But what made him think of going so far?"

"For your sake, dear Nunziata; to make his fortune, and then to come, to fly, as he says himself, to ask for you."

"Yes, it is true," replied Nunziata, smiling, and showing all her pearly teeth; "but do you think, Margherita, that he will soon make his fortune?"

"Are you in a hurry, dearest?"

"Oh, it isn't that; but because the other day, when I was talking about all sorts of things to papa, I asked him how long it took to make one's fortune in America, and he——"

"And what did he say?"

"That often people came back poorer than they went."

Margherita sighed, and a shade of sadness passed over her face. These words of Nunziata's, unintentionally cruel, corresponded too exactly with her own secret thoughts and anxieties.

But Nunziata, so quick at seeing anything that concerned herself, neither perceived this cloud nor heard this sigh.

"He said too," she continued, making the wound deeper, "that it takes many years of hard labour; and that when people have no capital, they must be willing to do the most horrid work."

"The meanest; I know that," Margherita corrected, in a gentle, but decided, tone. "My poor brother; goodness knows when he will return!"

"That is easily managed," said Nunziata; "if he is sent for he will come back at once."

"My dear child, do you think he would like to come back?"

"And why not, if we send for him?"

"Ah, you don't know him yet, Nunziatina dear; he has a heart of iron, you know! When he has once said that he will do a thing, he will either do it or perish. How could he come back penniless, without being able to ask for you, and without a hope of winning you? Did you ever think of this?"

"I am thinking of something else now."

Margherita gave her a look of surprise. Already, with her sensible way of looking at things, she had felt great doubts as to Nunziata's steadiness, whom she often, and not entirely from habit, used to call her child. After all, it was hardly two years since Nunziata had put away the doll, that, as I have said already, was the most beautiful and best beloved of all. But this time at least Margherita was mistaken.

"I am thinking," repeated the girl, looking at her with a malicious air, "I am thinking——"

"About what? Tell me."

"I am thinking of a grand plan, do you know!"

"A grand plan?"

"Indeed, a very grand plan."

"All out of your own head?"

"Out of my own little head," replied the provoking girl. "Do you think I couldn't?"

"Oh, I didn't say that; you are very touchy to-day, little one."

"Because I am a little angry with you still; but you must not look like that, or I sha'n't tell you anything, my pretty mamma."

Nunziata still kept up her little childish endearments and caressing ways, and with Margherita, her first love after her doll, they were sometimes very peculiar. But being called "mamma" gave Margherita a curious sensation. At a certain age, of course, maternal instincts awaken in a woman's heart, one might say a sort of new world opens to them. In a very secret chamber, where the light only penetrates through very thick curtains, a cradle, the temple of the house, may be found, where an angel is having its first sleep. But it was not in this way that Nunziata's words affected her; it was not that great, though delightful, uneasiness; on the contrary, it was a feeling of vague terror.

"Mamma," she repeatedly, mechanically, and as if to take time to think; "do I look so very old?"

"Oh, for me to love you like a mamma, you need not be as old as papa; who, after all, is young still. And he is a handsome man too; don't you think so?"

Margherita made no reply.

"What, do you not think him handsome and young still?"

"Yes, darling," replied Margherita; "besides, a man, when he has health and strength, is always young."

"I told him so. And he thought that I might give a hint."

"Who thought?"

"Papa; don't you understand? Papa, who couldn't make up his mind."

"What about?" asked Margherita, compelled to carry on this tiresome conversation, word by word, by a sort of fascination.

"Ah, that's true, I haven't told you yet; but if I tell you now, where will my secret be? Dear mamma, have patience; either wait for another time or guess."

Margherita was silent for a moment, wondering which was best for her, whether to prolong the uncertainty or to have done with it at once; but Nunziata, with her foolish love of talking, settled the matter.

"Well, are you guessing? Have you found it out?"

"Not I; how can I guess if you don't give me a hint?"

"Aha, your cleverness is at fault! I am glad of it, do you know; because it makes my plan seem more important. And I will tell you because I am not angry with you, and I haven't the heart to keep you in suspense. Some day or other, after all, you must know it, for it concerns yourself."

"It concerns me?" repeated Margherita, who was really in torture. "And how?"

"In this way. Papa likes you. You are beautiful—yes, I tell you, and I understand all about it—you are as beautiful as one of the goddesses we were looking at together in the National Museum. And then, you are a sensible woman; papa says so, and he understands about this better than I do perhaps. Just fancy, he is always telling me that I am a goose; and yet he always ends by doing what I wish. But let us come back to you; we two have settled, now guess!"

Margherita still kept silence.

"Goodness, how dull you are to-day!" cried Nunziata, tapping the floor impatiently with her pretty foot. "I suppose I must tell it all from beginning to end, Signorina Margherita Altavilla," she continued, rising and making her a low bow; "one of these days, perhaps within ten days, perhaps in a fortnight, Signor Martino Palmanova will have the honour of asking you to marry him."

"Ah!" exclaimed Margherita, who now could neither doubt nor pretend.

"Yes," continued Nunziata, suddenly changing her pretended gravity; "papa wanted me to spy out the land—that is the usual expression—but I wouldn't. Why should I spy out the land that I know so well? My beloved Margherita couldn't say no; she loves me too well! In short, I have done all, settled all, and—I have told you all. Won't you give me a kiss?"

"And you say that the proposal will come——"

"In ten days or a fortnight. Papa is waiting for I don't know what. But in the meantime, you may prepare yourself. And mind, don't let him see that

I have said anything. I told him that it wasn't necessary, and that it would look like a bit of my folly. I shall become a sensible woman, too, like you, mamma. And then—just think!—when papa has married you, he can't object to my marrying Corrado, even without the American fortune. Aren't we rich enough, too? It follows as a matter of course. But what is the matter? Don't you feel well, Margherita?"

Poor Margherita was dumbfoundered. She, the wife of Signor Palmanova! And the happiness of Corrado in her hands. In fact, in her quick way, she saw everything in an instant—and Errico di Sarno? Her dream of love, so delightful and so dear, was it to vanish in this way?

"There is nothing the matter with me; only giddiness," she said, giving herself a shake. "My dear Nunziata, you tell me coolly something which a girl——"

"Come now; if any one told me that I was to marry Corrado this very day——"

"Yes, I know it would seem all right, because it is an idea you are accustomed too; while I was quite unprepared. I never dreamt of thinking of such things; and, you know, my intention has always been, and is still" (Margherita put out this frail plank timidly, without expecting too much from it), "to remain as my poor father's companion."

"Oh, but you needn't leave him for this! We should make one family. And then, what were you thinking of? That you would stay at home to nurse the cat? You are beautiful, I have told you so

already; papa is in love with you, and I too. But mind, we are jealous; we like to see you in this window, I, at least, because this is my concern. And, above all, you mustn't take your frame into your neighbour's room."

Without knowing it, that sharp little Nunziata hit her lovely friend in a very tender place.

That day, Signor Martino Palmanova received from Margherita a more embarrassed bow than usual. Happily, he paid no heed. He, a man of business, accustomed to live among the anxieties of the money market, and for twelve hours in the day to have to do with the hard-working people of Piliero and Molo, had neither time nor opportunity of puzzling his brains over these small niceties. And then, how could he suspect any dislike from this girl, even supposing she knew of his designs through that chatterbox, his daughter? With his wealth, compared with her position, noble indeed, but destitute, or nearly so, were not the condescension and sacrifice greater on his side?

No sooner were the Palmanovas gone, and her father had returned to his easel and pallet again, than Margherita retired to her own room for a good cry. She had need of it. Margherita was strong-minded, but even strong minds occasionally require the relief given by tears. What was she to do? She felt that already she had begun to love Signor Errico di Sarno. Yet how could she frame an excuse for refusing Signor Palmanova. Most certainly if she said "no" to his offer, Corrado's chances of happiness might suffer. But this, she thought, could only happen in case there was no prior occupant. Now

if they could tell him, "Margherita is engaged to some one else," Signor Martino could not complain, nor quarrel with them on that ground.

But how to bring about this state of things? There was only one hope: to manage so that Errico di Sarno could speak to her father; and here Margherita remembered happily that her father had expressed a wish to ask his neighbour of the fourth storey some question. This was a chance of bringing them together, and she determined not to lose it. Hastily drying her tears she returned to the studio, where the old man was seated at his easel, giving the last touches to his copy of Salvator Rosa, which, towards evening, he meant to take back to the picture dealer's. This would bring him fifty francs for his expense and trouble.

Signor Ruggero was working laboriously at his task when he felt some one lay a hand lightly on his shoulder. On turning to see who it was he perceived his daughter Margherita.

"Father dear."

"Is it you, Margherita?" he said, with a smile, and looking now at her and then at the painting before him; "can it be the hour for dinner?"

"Not yet, father; I came to see how your picture was getting on. It is finished, it seems to me."

"Yes, almost; a few touches more, and then it may go. I am pretty well satisfied with it."

Margherita wished to turn the conversation into another channel, but this was not easy. The usual *à propos*, so convenient when changing from one subject to another, would not do,

But not for nothing were girls given their wits by God; and not for nothing had Salvator Rosa, his faithful servant, been inspired to paint with a few strokes of his brush, a bastion with a couple of towers on the top of a rock.

"What a lovely castle!" exclaimed Margherita. "How nice it would be there, far from the world—you, and I, and Corrado!"

"Ah yes—Corrado!" replied the old man, with a sigh; "God knows when we shall see him again!"

"He will come back, dear father; he will be back sooner than we think. I have a presentiment that he will not be able to stay long so far away from us."

"And from Signorina Nunziata," added the old man, "eh?"

"Oh, certainly she has her share! But hear me, father," said Margherita, unwilling to lose the clue, "is this an imaginary castle, or is it a real one?"

"You must ask Salvator Rosa that question," replied Signor Ruggero; "I am merely copying him."

"If we only had one like it!" continued Margherita. "Tell me, by the way, what is the castle of Melito like? Is it on a rock like this one?"

"Margherita, my dear, what ideas are you putting into my head, now? See, I was beginning to look forward to my dinner," said the old gentleman, "and these reminiscences will take away my appetite."

"Dear father, I was wrong," said she, with a contrite look. "But why don't we go on with the lawsuit, and have the matter settled one way or another?"

"Let us do so, certainly; but about the expense?"

"You are right, there would be expenses. But, after all, what would they come to, these wonderful costs? Why should justice be so expensive, now that we are under a liberal government?"

"My dear child, governments—governments have little to do with it, and liberty still less. It is a question of men, and men are always the same. Now that we have got justice, the judges are little better than fools, and the lawyers——"

"*A propos* of lawyers," interrupted Margherita; "could you not speak to Signor Errico di Sarno? He is a clever man, and would give us good advice. You remember that you thought of asking him if we had any claims, and if there was still time to bring them forward."

"Yes, and I remember too," replied Signor Ruggero, "that you advised me not to meddle with these things again."

"But not then; it was long ago," replied she, promptly; "that was when you had to look for lawyers, and to ask for advice that would have cost God knows how much. But this is a different thing. Signor Errico di Sarno is an excellent young man, so clever, he will be able to tell you how things stand, and to give you some friendly advice."

Margherita had no secrets from her father, and as soon as she had become acquainted with Signora Concetta's lodger she had told about him, describing all his attention to the landlady, and how pleasant he was in himself. Ruggero Altavilla thought very highly of his daughter, and had seen nothing to object

to in their meeting. Besides, his daughter required no protection from him, or from any one else, being sufficiently protected by her own good sense. So it was now settled, then, that Signor Errico di Sarno should be invited. But Signor Ruggero was a gentleman, and would not leave the invitation to his daughter; he went himself that very day to make the acquaintance of his neighbour, his future counsellor.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

ON being introduced into Signor Ruggero's studio, which, as we know, served also as a reception room, Renato seated himself on a chair offered him by Margherita. The window was at his side, and Signor Ruggero sat with the bright morning light falling full in his face. The face of the old man, on a near inspection and in this bright light, made a deep impression on Renato. In the Palazzo Caivano there were family portraits singularly like the face of his host.

Margherita sat a little apart in the window recess, and had asked leave to go on with her work. There, under her father's eyes, with all her domestic surroundings, she felt herself safer, and did not waste a thought on what Nunziata would say when she perceived that her embroidery frame was missing in the other window. And there she sat, absorbed in her work, thinking of Renato, and listening to his voice. Renato could only see her from time to time, when he raised his head a little, but he knew she was near;

he felt himself surrounded by that delightful atmosphere, and he was happy, much happier than on the fourth storey in his own room. The ingratitude of the world! If his old landlady could have imagined it!

"Signor di Sarno," began the old gentleman, in a confidential tone, which made the other very sensible of the deception he was practising, "you know why I have asked you to come up here. My daughter, whose good sense, though I am her father, I must acknowledge, has told me so much about you—your cleverness and nobleness, and, above all, your excellent heart."

Renato made a low bow, and took advantage of the opportunity to glance at Margherita, who, to her credit, was ready to receive and return the look.

"And this," continued Signor Ruggero, "was my reason for asking for the honour of a visit from you, and, if you have no objection, for your friendship likewise. I can return it sincerely."

"Thank you!" replied Renato, greatly touched. "You may rely not only on my friendship, but on my perfect devotion. From this instant they are at your service."

Signor Ruggero pressed his hand affectionately, and proceeded forthwith to business.

"We are not rich," he said, "and consulting lawyers costs a mint of money; at least," he added, "where friendship does not diminish, on the part of the client, the weight of obligation, and, on the part of the lawyer, his just claims. Am I right? Well, then, from my parents I have inherited a lawsuit.

But is there any use in going on with it? That is the point. The story is rather a long one, and there are plenty of legal documents; I only fear there may be too many. For a long time I have wished to show them to some one, and to have an opinion on them. But how, and to whom? Good lawyers have little time for needy clients. Besides, if the opinion ran counter to my hopes, not very great at any time, it would be a waste of money, and I may say a robbery from my children."

"Your sentiments do you credit," said Renato, "but I venture to say, at the Neapolitan Bar you might have found good men glad to give you their opinion honestly, without thinking much about fees."

"I think so too; but, to begin with, one must be acquainted with them, and the chances and changes of life in my case have prevented my forming any acquaintances among them, or inheriting any ready made. The heedlessness of youth, conspiracies, exile, everything has conspired to keep me from attending to my own affairs. The first lawsuit, dragged out through ten years by my lawyers, before I was reduced to extremities, was cut short by my flight from Naples in 1844, after the Cosenza attempt, in which, I am proud to say, I did my best. I returned in 1848, but those were not times for courts of law. A year after I had again to take the road into exile, and with what a heavy heart you can imagine, as I left behind me a baby of a year old, my dear Margherita, and a beloved wife near her second confinement. From that day my life has been a hard one, and I thought myself happy when, a little

later, I could have my family to share the bitter life of an exile with me. The year 1860 restored me to my country, but poor, and with no friends to support my cause. Perhaps it is my fault, perhaps that of destiny; I only know that, while many have profited by the new *régime*, I have not found out the way. I should, I know, have tried to ingratiate myself and have made the most of my small services towards my country; but I have never been able to do this, nor, to speak plainly, did I wish it. However, let us return to the matter in hand. I tried to go on with the lawsuit, but my old lawyer was dead; another, an acquaintance of mine, and an honest man, but too busy, gave a superficial glance at the papers, and said to me: 'Have you money to spend and time to wait?' 'Neither the one nor the other,' was my reply. 'Then we can do nothing,' was his ultimatum. And so we have gone on, putting the matter off from year to year. I shall make no secret of it to you, Signor di Sarno, that, among the reasons which induced my son Corrado to make this expedition to America, was the hope of coming home rich, or at least rich enough to go on with the lawsuit, that should restore us to our proper rank.

"Your son is a noble fellow!" Renato exclaimed, with the vision of the young sailor before his eyes, climbing into the rigging of the brigantine.

"Then you know him?" the old man inquired.

"No, I don't know him," replied Renato, recovering himself in time. "Only by appearance."

"Ah, yes! Poor Corrado! God grant that he may return soon, for I sha'n't be able to wait for him long."

"My dear father!" exclaimed Margherita, in a tone of affectionate reproof.

"Yes; what, do you expect, my dear children," replied the old man, affectionately joining the daughter that was present with his absent son, "that I can bathe in the fountain of perpetual youth? I am now fifty-five; I was born in 1813, and, worse than old, I am weary; no one knows how hard the life of an exile is except those who have experienced it. But I am wandering again from my subject; this is the second digression already," added Signor Ruggero, penitently, "and I fear it won't be the last. Old age is garrulous. I was saying, then, that Corrado had gone in hopes of returning rich enough to try once more for justice. But will there be time? Have we not waited too long already? Perhaps we have allowed the proper time to expire, beyond which those in the right might find themselves in the wrong?"

"We must see," said Renato. "The lawsuit was with a relation of yours?"

"Exactly."

"A relation of your own or your wife?"

"Of my own; of the family of Altavilla."

A sudden gleam of the truth shot through Renato's mind, and a voice within him, the voice of honour, which makes itself so plainly heard in the heart of a gentleman, told the young Duke of Melito that he ought not to hear any further. But this was easier said than done. How could he bear the astonishment of Signor Ruggero and of Margherita? After all, too, it was only a suspicion; there were so many Altavillas.

"And—" he stammered in a low voice, "have your opponents much interest?"

"A great deal, Signor di Sarno. Of course I am speaking to a man of honour. The face is the index of the heart."

"Signor Ruggero," he replied, "I give you my word of honour. Anything that you tell me in confidence will be safe with me."

"I believe it, I believe it. So you shall hear everything. The family that contests our rights with us, the family with which I went to law immediately after coming of age, that is to say, from 1834 to the day when, for political reasons, I had to fly the kingdom, is the Prince of Caivano, Duke of Melito, Marquis of Villareal, and of Candia, Counts of Altavilla, of Policastro, of Locri, and of other castles in Lower Calabria."

A thunderbolt falling close to him could hardly have upset Renato more than did the old man's introductory words.

Destiny had fulfilled his wishes. He had fallen in love with the daughter, and he was the trusted and honoured guest, of the enemies of his house. Of this branch of the family of Caivano he had never heard, though there had been allusions to an old lawsuit, begun some time before he was born, and finished or broken off by their opponents while he was still an infant. The why and wherefore had escaped his memory; perhaps they had not been talked of before him. Moreover he had not been of an age to understand, and no one had ever mentioned these would-be cousins to him. What foundation could their claims

have in law? Their not having been brought forward for so many years seemed sufficient condemnation. But now they had come up again, and Renato could not look at them any longer from this point of view. Was not Ruggero Altavilla the father of Margherita? And the first time he had seen her, he had felt convinced that she was of good family. Everything, therefore, led him to believe rather than to doubt that their claims were not unfounded.

With these thoughts what would he not have given to be able to say, "Signor Ruggero, you must not trust me; I am Renato, Duke of Melito, the eldest son of the Prince of Caivano." But the words stuck in his throat. Two fears, or rather three, prevented him; first, having to confess, then and there, that he was an impostor, who had introduced himself to them under a false name; secondly, the fear of seeming to have made Margherita's acquaintance from unworthy motives; and finally, that by so doing the house would be for ever closed to him, that temple which contained all that was most precious to him. Besides (and this thought overcame all doubts in his mind), was it not the part of a gentleman to try to clear up everything? It was a noble thing to say: "Don't trust me;" but was it not more noble to consider, to weigh the reasons, and to try to do justice, as far as it might be in his power to do it?

All these considerations passed through his mind in a few moments, while Signor Ruggero was going over all the titles of his family.

Renato's resolution was prompt and worthy of him.

"Signor," he said, though his trembling voice be-

trayed his agitation, "what proofs can you give of your claims to the titles and property of the House of Caivano and Melito?"

The old man observed his agitation and looked at him with surprise. Renato thought indeed, that his question must have seemed too abrupt, and hastened to soften it down.

"I am speaking as a lawyer, you understand. In court proofs must be forthcoming."

"Oh, proofs are not wanting," replied the old man. "I have the reports of the trial twenty-four years ago, and others also, which I shall be glad to submit to your judgment. But would it not be better for me to tell you the whole story first, before letting you see the documents in proof of it. What do you think?"

"Excellent!" Renato exclaimed. "Let me hear."

Signor Ruggero began his story, starting from the second generation before him. And Renato listened to him for two hours, or little less, with so much attention, that, for a time, he even forgot to take a look at Margherita.

The experiences of Signor Ruggero and the vicissitudes of the lawsuit made a deep impression on Renato's mind. That old man was really an Altavilla of Melito, a cousin of his father's, or rather he represented in a direct line the eldest branch of the family, and having a better right than Renato's father, ought to bear the title of Prince of Caivano.

But was he telling the truth? Were there not, at least here and there in the family genealogy, blanks and gaps which interrupted the chain of relationship,

and is not the law a wise one which refuses to receive such as evidence? Several times he felt tempted to protest against certain statements, that seemed to him rather daring, indeed insulting, to his forefathers. But the thought of Margherita restrained him, as she sat there a few steps from him, and the desire to know everything confirmed him in his determination to listen in silence. After all, would he not have time enough to refute the accusations; and to produce proofs was surely the best way of confounding the enemy.

Therefore, while following the thread of the story, he succeeded so completely in severing his family from this confused mass of lawsuits and disputes, that he could listen quite impartially. And because he was a gentleman, and many things, by no means censurable in a court of honour, seemed objectionable to him, his countenance became occasionally much disturbed, and the colour mounted to his face.

"If it should be true!" he went on, repeating to himself, as if to lessen the impression of the accusations, and to modify the sentence he felt obliged to pass on certain doings of his forefathers, especially of his grandfather; "if it should be true! But we shall see."

Certainly Renato required all his strength of mind. If Signor Ruggero were right, a will had been made away with. His grandfather, indeed, had not been accused of this piece of villainy, but an agent of his. However, his grandfather had profited by it, and people might suspect, reasonably too, that he had been privy to the deed, supposing of course that the

story were true. Renato consoled himself with this reflection, and took courage to listen to the rest of the old man's narrative.

Signor Ruggero remarked his agitation; but he attributed it to the effect which his tale ought to produce on every right-thinking man. How could he imagine that chance, or destiny, had given him as a hearer and counsellor, the grandson and son of his adversaries?

"This is the state of the case then," said he, when he had finished his story. "And these are the documents, and the marriage certificate of my poor father."

So saying, he had gone to a cabinet and taken out a bundle of papers, tied with a green ribbon, a symbol apparently of the hopes of the disinherited family.

"Signor Ruggero," said Renato, after having glanced hastily at the documents which the old man had spread on the table, "your story has made a great impression on me, and this you must have perceived. But these legal documents I don't comprehend easily; were I even to read and examine them carefully one by one, still that familiarity with the practice of law (not to be acquired in universities) is in my case wanting. Therefore, though my impression is that you have grounds—sufficient grounds," he added hastily, correcting himself, "to go on with the lawsuit, will you allow me to ask the advice of an excellent lawyer, one of the first at our bar?"

"Most willingly; I should be much obliged to you, Signor Errico," replied the old man; "but I have

already told you, I am not rich enough to pay for advice, while it is still uncertain whether to go on with the suit or not."

"Oh, you need not be uneasy; this is a friend," said Renato, promptly; "a friend who would do me this little service. If the opinion of a learned and honest lawyer like him" (and here these words came out with an effort), "should be in your favour, he might possibly undertake the case himself. Justice before everything; and I believe this new trial should not, and could not be objected to by the Prince of Caivano and his family, who, if I am not mistaken, have a motto on their coat-of-arms which should be acted up to."

"That's true, there is a 'digne,'" replied Signor Ruggero, "that means 'everything worthily.'"

"Signor Errico di Sarno," put in Margherita, who had risen from her chair as the colloquy apparently had come to an end, "knows the history of all the illustrious families of Naples."

Renato coloured as he made her a bow.

"Signorina Margherita remembers how she made me tell her the story of the heart of iron and heart of gold in the coat-of-arms of the Altavillas," he retorted; "but I came to know that, I may say, by chance, and am far from possessing all the knowledge she so kindly credits me with. But, Signor Ruggero," he continued, turning to the old man, "the little I know, and the little I am worth, are at your service."

"Thank you, Signor Errico, and I shall be grateful to you for ever. As to making you any return, that cannot be; we are your humble servants."

"What do you mean?" replied Renato, touched by the old man's affectionate words. "I should thank you, and be obliged to you for your trust in me, almost a stranger. Say no more, pray. Now I shall try to remember all you have told me. Only let me take a few notes of the documents to refer to when I see my friend."

So saying, he drew out his pocket-book. But this arrangement did not commend itself to Margherita.

"Father," said she, coming forward, "could not Signor di Sarno take this bundle of papers with him to read them, and think quietly over them in his room?"

"Signorina!" exclaimed Renato, giving a start of consternation.

"And why not?" she asked. "Do you think our confidence in you is confined to words? If so, what must you think of us?"

"I understand what you mean," he replied, "and thank you for your consideration. But, you see, among these papers are documents of great value. If they went astray even——"

"Come now, Signor Errico, there can be no great danger in carrying them from this room to yours. You will be able to read them at your ease, and tell us your opinion to-morrow. Eh, father?"

"Certainly," said Signor Ruggero. "I agree with all my daughter has said. Here is our treasure."

Renato could not make any more objections.

"Signorina, Signor Ruggero, to-morrow you shall have them again," he replied, as he took the precious packet. "This proof of your esteem I shall never

forget. And you too," he added, in a rather mysterious and excited tone, "some day you will remember with pleasure that I have been received and trusted by you as a gentleman."

With these words he took his leave. Margherita accompanied him to the door. The young people exchanged glances, which, notwithstanding the reserve on one side and the deference on the other, said unutterable things.

Renato's agitation had told on Signor Ruggero, who returned to his easel, but only to stand, lost in thought, with his palette in one hand and his brush lying idle.

"What are you thinking about, papa?" asked Margherita.

"I am thinking," replied the old man, "that perhaps Signor Errico was right. A document, when it leaves a person's hands, may be so easily lost."

"You have no doubts about Signor Errico?"

"No, I have no doubts; but he is so young!"

"Yes, but then he is so steady, so good and loyal!"

Signor Ruggero raised his eyes to look at his pretty daughter, as the colour rushed into her face.

"You are in love with him," he said, in the kindest and gentlest tone.

Margherita made no answer, and hid her beautiful, blushing face on her father's shoulder.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WILL.

TO understand the intricacies of Don Ruggero's lawsuit we must go back three generations, or rather four, if we count young Renato, and make the personal acquaintance of his great-grandfather, Don Federigo Altavilla, eighth Duke of Melito, and second Prince of Caivano.

Don Federigo was, briefly, what a prince of the old school might be expected to be. He believed in God, a great deal in the king, still more in his own feudal rights. In the years when the French Revolution was stirring Europe, he had followed King Ferdinand in his flight into Sicily.

When the Parthenopean Republic had been overthrown, Don Federigo retired to his rock of Melito, in Calabria, with his two sons, Corrado and Ruggero, to restore there, in the exercise of his feudal rights, the authority of his rank.

It was in this trusty castle, where he could imagine himself still in the times of the old barons, that Don Federigo made his will. Knowing well that the

abolition of primogeniture would be the ruin of the aristocracy, he in 1805, with the concurrence of the family lawyer, and of his steward, disposed of all his property in favour of Corrado, his eldest son, leaving to his second son, Ruggero, the life use of a certain sum, and the title of Count of Locri. The Prince of Caivano left the will in the hands of his notary, an honest man.

But Neapolitan feudalism, after the first blow dealt to it by the Parthenopean Republic, was to receive some others, to the great grief of the old gentleman. After crushing the Austrians on the field of Austerlitz, and the conclusion of the Peace of Pressburg, Napoleon I. had suddenly turned against Ferdinand of Naples. The latter, with the fidelity characteristic of his house, had, on the 9th of October of that same year 1805, concluded a treaty of neutrality with France; and seventeen days later had subscribed one of alliance with Russia, Austria, and England, accepting joyfully a contingent of nineteen thousand English and Russians, who disembarked in the neighbourhood of Naples.

Massena, then in Italy, received orders to march on Naples with thirty-seven thousand men. The new allies of the King of Naples, on the approach of the French, retired, and the king, having no faith in his own army, fled to Sicily, his old refuge. Soon after, Naples received a newly-made king, Joseph Bonaparte, the brother of the terrestrial Jupiter, the Emperor of the French.

During the three years of his reign, Joseph decreed and promoted liberal reforms in the State; abolished

feoffments and feudal rights, and, if the nobles were allowed to retain their titles, they were deprived of their privileges. And he might have remained secure enough under his brother's protecting arm if the emperor, made master of Spain in 1808, had not thought of taking Joseph from Naples and transplanting him to Madrid. The king obeyed, though unwillingly, and the crown of Naples was assumed by Joachim Murat, the emperor's brother-in-law.

Under Murat the old feudal rights were continued and daringly exercised in every part of Italy, till at last, when too late, the new king had recourse to the remedy of dividing the lands between the barons and the communes, a policy which only made the nobles still more discontented. Then came the great Russian campaign, and Murat turned against his brother-in-law in his misfortunes, and so preserved his kingdom for a time. On Napoleon's escape from Elba, Murat once more allied himself with his kinsman, and before long, after having been driven from his kingdom, was shot in an attempted descent on the coast of Calabria, and Ferdinand recovered his old kingdom.

Don Federigo Altavilla did not see the triumph of his king. The constant vicissitudes of the last few years, the frequent anxieties and sorrows, had been too much for his strength. Even in 1808, a heavy blow had fallen on him. Corrado, his eldest son, his favourite Corrado, weary of an idle life at the extremities of Calabria, longing for something new, and hoping for that marshal's bâton supposed to be in every soldier's knapsack, had left the castle of Melito, to repair to Naples, to offer his services to King

Joachim, the great hero of Aboukir and Jena. And the latter had received him with open arms, delighted to see the nobility, who till now had held aloof, show some signs of accepting the new order of things. Two months after the arrival in Naples of Corrado Altavilla, Duke of Melito, he was an officer; a year after, he was captain of the guard.

The old Prince of Caivano, always shut up in his castle, whose very name he considered had been dishonoured, was furious, and threatened to make a new will to disinherit his son. But the days passed, and the prince never made up his mind to call the notary, though his wrath, apparently, was not diminished, and though his steward, more anxious, for his own private ends, that Ruggero, the second son, should succeed him, laboured diligently to keep his wrath alive. The old man's slowness to do anything gave him reason to think that his anger was not very sincere, or, at least, that it was very superficial. And this opinion was confirmed by the fact, that the presence of the son at Murat's court was of no small advantage to his father. The law for abolishing all fiefs, and for their division between nobles and commons, in force everywhere else, did not seem to apply to Don Federigo. The Duchy of Melito and the Principality of Caivano, in the eyes of many who watched every movement of the government seemed superior to the laws.

The thought of these advantages assuredly did not weigh with Don Federigo. He was excessively fond of Corrado; he loved him with that blind, exclusive love with which old nobles loved their firstborn from

their cradles, because they accustomed themselves to see in them their privileged heirs, the hope of the family. And, though he would not let it appear, he followed every step of his son with a watchful eye. More than once in the bulletins his name was mentioned, and this was a glory without a drawback more acceptable to Don Federigo, an old soldier, than any other. The royal Neapolitan guard had, under the command of Murat, taken part in the Moscow campaign, and the Duke of Melito, made colonel on the field of battle, had been praised by Bonaparte for his share in the battles of Vilna and Smolensk.

After the battle of Borodino there was an alarming rumour. The Duke of Melito was dead, killed by a ball in the breast as he was pressing gallantly forwards. A soldier's death! But Don Federigo received the news neither with the fortitude of a soldier nor with the tranquillity of a philosopher. He became unconscious on hearing it as told by his major-domo with many tears and sighs. When he recovered, his mind was gone. A violent attack of fever followed; for many days his life was in danger. However, his body stood the shock, but not his mind. When he had shaken off the fever, a greater evil made its appearance—the Prince of Caivano was insane.

In consequence of this unforeseen catastrophe, the hopes of the major-domo vanished in smoke. As he had not succeeded in persuading his master while angry to make a new will, he persuaded himself for a moment that he might succeed through the reported death of the heir. To the confusion of Vito Schisano's designs (for so the Altavilla major-domo was called),

the prince had fallen into a worse state; he was neither dead nor alive; he vegetated miserably, like a tree struck by lightning; but with this sad remnant of life, he would not consent to the worthy Schisano making any other arrangement.

To complete the disaster, the heir was not dead as had been reported. Corrado had been carried wounded from the banks of the Moscowa, and transported to a castle in the neighbourhood of Borodino. A young lady lived here, a countess, beautiful and compassionate; and she nursed the hero with the most unbounded care. Colonel Altavilla was not a Frenchman; therefore she felt nothing of that ceremonious coldness which should certainly have taken the place of charity when the wounded enemy was out of danger; he was handsome, brave, and of noble lineage, and the reader may guess the sequel—before very long the two were man and wife.

In the meantime the victories had been followed by reverses. Corrado, not quite recovered, left Russia to return to Italy with the young duchess. A sad return! The Prince of Caivano saw, but did not recognize his son, and had no smile for his daughter-in-law, notwithstanding her beauty and her hopes that the Castle of Melito might behold a representative of the third generation.

The vicissitudes of his native land brought Corrado Altavilla back to Naples, and then to the army in Central Italy. Though life was not very bright in that Calabrian hermitage, the duchess had no wish to leave the castle. But her crazy father-in-law did not know her, her brother-in-law was coldly polite,

the servants obedient and nothing more. The beautiful Russian felt herself isolated among them. Therefore she clung to her husband and took up her abode in Naples, where her first and only child was born.

Corrado, who was far from anticipating what the fate of the child was to be, gave him the name of his brother Ruggero, Count of Locri. On the flight of Murat, to whom he had adhered with noble fidelity, Corrado, being no longer bound to the fallen government and not wishing to serve under the Bourbons, went off with his wife and child to Calabria. But he was not to see his father again. The poor old man was dead; and the Count of Locri was master in the castle, prepared to dispute the inheritance with his elder brother. This he announced as soon as he had spoken to Corrado, and told him of his father's death. Corrado, who knew of the will, was much astonished at this piece of information, so contrary to the well-known intentions of the Prince of Caivano. They looked for the will, but the notary who had drawn it up had died shortly before, and among his papers no will could be found.

What was he to do? Make an uproar? He had good grounds for doing so; especially as in the books of the notary, an important entry was found to this effect: "On the 8th of May, 1805, the will of the illustrious Prince of Caivano was given into my keeping; the will making Don Corrado, his elder son, heir of the Principality of Caivano, of the Duchy of Melito, and of all the other property belonging to the family."

This will had certainly been made away with; but

how and by whom? Corrado could not help thinking "Is ficit Cui prodest," when a note was conveyed to him by a friendly hand from King Joachim, containing these few words, "Landed at Pizzo; come and join me there.—MURAT."

The handwriting was like the king's. Corrado thought he recognized it, though the note was scribbled in haste with a pencil. But this was only an additional proof of authenticity in the eyes of Corrado Altavilla.

The thought that the good King Joachim, the man who had given him so many and such striking proofs of his affection, required his assistance, put spurs to the heels of the Duke of Melito; and, leaving the duchess in his father's castle and the question of the heirship in suspense, he hastened in a carriage along the road to Monteleone. On arriving at Pizzo and hearing of the king's capture, there was no time left to make his escape. The *gendarmes* were upon him, and the eagerness with which he was discovered and captured proved that his arrival was not unexpected. The generous Corrado had fallen into a snare, laid for him by one who had good reasons for wishing him out of the way.

He lost no time thinking about this. To find out some way of making his escape was the first thing. The *gendarmes* had consigned him to the soldiers. By great good luck, a compassionate sergeant recognized him as his general at the battle of Tolentino. Neither the one nor the other betrayed their knowledge; but that very evening the sergeant came into

the room where the prisoner was confined, and remarked in an audible voice that the window was on the first floor. This observation was not lost on Corrado, and, as soon as it was dark, he opened the window, scrambled out and let himself drop to the ground. As he was in the act of crossing the court-yard, or rather of going through the gate, left open by a friendly hand, he heard a low voice saying—

"Good luck, general; take to the mountain, there is no one there."

In this way he escaped the military junta, sent to Pizzo to deal summary justice to Murat. As for himself, six balls in the breast would have been his share, as an accomplice of the pretender; for such was Bourbon justice.

Corrado Altavilla guessed afterwards where the blow came from. Once more he had occasion to apply to himself the old maxim in jurisprudence quoted above: "Is fecit Cui prodest." A month after his escape from Naples, a feat by no means without danger and at one time apparently impossible, a decree of King Ferdinand's confiscated all Corrado's possessions—the half of his father's property, Don Federigo being considered as having died intestate—and gave them as the reward of fidelity, with all the titles and rights belonging to them, to his brother Ruggero.

Before long another event occurred which increased the exile's suspicions. The new Prince of Caivano married Annella Schisano, the daughter of his major-domo. Corrado then remembered the subservient manners and grave expression of that domestic;

and, as he had heard from the relations of the Melito notary, that the worthy man was hardly dead before Schisano had gone to rummage in his study under the pretence of removing some of his own papers, he came to the conclusion that on that very occasion his father's will had been made away with for Ruggero's benefit. Accordingly, his younger brother, having secured one half of the property by making away with his father's will, succeeded in getting hold of everything by the confiscation, for his own benefit, of all that should have gone to Corrado. And it was natural that he should pay this debt of gratitude to his major-domo, whether he were instigator or accomplice, by marrying his daughter. Everything then, even the pitfall at Pizzo, was quite plain to Corrado Altavilla. And the duchess, who in the meantime had left the castle to follow her husband into exile, told him so many things about the ill-concealed delight of the triumphant villains, and their uncourteous manners to her, that Corrado had no longer any doubts—it was all as clear as noonday.

Even at Melito and in the neighbourhood there had been a great deal of talk about this very unequal match, though among the lower orders it was approved of as a sign of goodness of heart and absence of pride. Annella, too, was a beautiful Calabrese, with eyes like stars, a perfect figure, and beautiful complexion; in short, a wonderful woman, not much like her mother, though she had been beautiful in her time, and not like her father at all, who, as people said, was as ugly as sin.

A gipsy woman, six years before, had said to Annella, "You will die a princess;" and Vito Schisano, to fulfil the prophecy, had laid aside honesty, had become a thief, a liar, and a spy; and if he did not turn assassin, it was from no want of will.

Let us return to Corrado. The poor prince, whose very title was disputed by the Bourbon king, sought refuge in Spain, where he took part in the liberal rising of 1820, and where he at last died, leaving to his son Ruggero nothing but the sword which he had wielded honourably on so many battlefields, from Wagram to the Trocadero.

Moreover, his widow had still a good fortune left. The Czar had been very kind to her, and though she had become the wife of an enemy, and had quitted the empire without his permission, he had not confiscated her property. Relations high in rank had pleaded the cause of the Countess Tolstoi, and Alexander had forgiven the fugitive her love-match.

The last wish expressed by the dying man had been that his son Ruggero should return to Naples, to his native land, which he had not been permitted to see again; and his widow, in obedience to his wishes, had brought the boy back to Italy. The reasons which made the father's exile necessary did not hold good in the case of his son.

The duchess (let us call her so to distinguish her from the Altavilla in possession of the principality) profited by her return to see if it were possible to obtain for her son from her brother-in-law's generosity what the Bourbon confiscation had taken from her husband. She did not ask that the son should

be restored to the rights of his father, but to that part of the property which, supposing the old man had died intestate, should have come to him. The Prince of Caivano refused even to see his sister-in-law, protesting that he did not even know with certainty whether she had a right to bear the name of Altavilla. As to her son, if she liked to leave him in his hands she might; he would place him in a military college and have him made a good soldier like his father, but more faithful to his legitimate king than he had been.

There were three insults to the duchess in this reply—as a lady, as a wife, and as a mother. The duchess replied haughtily to Vito Schisano, who was the bearer of this message from the prince—"That he, if he were a gentleman, should not now doubt and ask for the proofs of a marriage as to which he had never expressed any doubt while his brother Corrado was alive; moreover that she was able to educate her son without alms, which, even supposing she were poor and needy, she would have indignantly refused from people who made so little of her husband's military services, and of the glory he had brought to the House of Altavilla."

Negotiations being broken off in this way, the duchess settled in Naples, without troubling herself further about these unnatural relations, and with maternal solicitude had Ruggero educated in a way suitable to his name and his father's honoured memory. This was the last tribute of her love to Corrado; and the duchess did it with all the zeal and earnestness, characteristic of her native land. The

young man grew up under the eyes of this wonderful woman, without knowing what it was to want for anything. Was he not an Altavilla? And should he not keep up the dignity of the family as much, or more, than his uncle Ruggero or his cousin Federigo.

But, as the intelligent reader is aware, this cannot be done without spending a good deal of money. The honour of the name was kept up in a way that did not suit the duchess's finances. Accordingly, along with the interest, some of her capital went also; and when Ruggero was left an orphan, at the age of twenty-two, he found himself with his finances much impaired, and a colossal lawsuit on his hands. This was the lawsuit against his uncle, the Prince of Caivano, and the owner of Don Federigo's property.

The duchess, by no means versed in the intricacies of the law, had not understood much of that business about the disputed property; nor had she ever thought that it would be possible to get justice from her brother-in-law by bringing him into court. But one fine day he bethought himself of contesting her right to bear the title of Duchess of Melito. The anger, repressed for years, broke forth; and it was then, a few months before her death, that she had consulted lawyers and been advised to claim the property, according to the disposition of her father-in-law, as appeared from the entry in the books of the Melito notary.

Accordingly the lawsuit was begun during the duchess's life, and its course was much the same as all litigation of the kind; it experienced all the obstacles, all the delays and trouble that make going to law so delightful.

In 1838, that is four years after the death of Ruggero's excellent mother, the Prince of Caivano also died. In consequence of this death, the two young men, Ruggero, the son of the Russian lady, and Federigo, the son of the usurper and the daughter of the major-domo, Anna Schisano, were left to carry on the lawsuit.

And now for a brief summary of the case itself. The defendants rested their defence on two grounds: first, disputing the legitimacy of the marriage of the parents of the plaintiff; secondly, maintaining the worthlessness of the entry in the notary's book, brought forward by the plaintiff in lack of better evidence.

The most excellent tribunal (so called, because in general a tribunal cannot be called excellent), after numerous delays and prorogations, at last decreed that the plaintiff was required to prove his legitimate descent from Corrado Altavilla, and to prove by other documents the asserted robbery of Don Federigo's will.

From this sentence there might of course be an appeal, and other twistings and turnings well known to lawyers were not wanting. A lawyer, a great friend of the author's, who had no objection to disclose the secrets of the law, told him once, that a civil case is never in greater danger of being lost, than when it is won. Imagine then Ruggero Altavilla's position with his case still entirely to win. Moreover, the sentence of the most excellent tribunal given above was not delivered till the year 1844, that is to say, ten years after the lawsuit had begun.

Ruggero Altavilla was born of a good family, and

this always asserts itself. He was tinged with Carbonarism; he had had a hand in the attempt of the Bandiera brothers, the Dioscuri of the Italian resurrection; and this attempt turning out a failure, Ruggero, like his father in Murat's time, was obliged to fly the kingdom. How had his share in this business been discovered? The friends of order say, that for some time Signor Ruggero's conduct had given rise to suspicion, and that the eyes of the police were upon him. To me it seems like a repetition of 1815, and that as Vito Schisano had a daughter then whom he wished to see married to Ruggero Altavilla, so he had possibly a son or a nephew to act the part of Judas with another Ruggero. And a nephew there certainly was, and his name was Salvatore Schisano, Signor Turiello in the Neapolitan dialect. This Signor Turiello our readers are already acquainted with; the grand-nephew of the major-domo, nephew of Donna Anna, Princess of Caivano, promoted to be his cousin's, the prince, superintendent, a difficult and delicate position between kinsman and servant.

Ruggero went into exile, and the lawsuit remained in abeyance. "Le combat finit, faute de combattants," or at least of one of the combatants. He had returned of course in 1848; but that was not a year for lawsuits. In the meantime Ruggero had married, and was now the father of two children, Margherita and Corrado. His wife had died when Corrado was born, and of course left to her husband a world of petty cares; and little time or opportunity remained for thinking of feudal rights, wills, or rights of inheritance—things he had never understood much about.

CHAPTER X.

IRRESOLUTION.

THE pretended Errico di Sarno spent the day in the greatest agitation of mind. He was perplexed, and his ideas, like ships in a storm, were tossing about under no control from the rudder. The truth was that he had not the slightest idea how to get out of this perplexity, or what resolution he ought to take; for he did not know what to think of this state of things, in which the honour of his family and the reputation of his forefathers were concerned, as he had for the first time heard.

It was no wonder therefore that Renato Altavilla should make his appearance in his own house at dinner-time, looking evidently much perturbed. Besides, what is known to us was not known to his family, and his perturbed looks attracted universal attention.

Before proceeding with our tale, let us make the acquaintance of these new characters. Of some we have had a glimpse already, in the hasty sketch given

in the last chapter; but in outline only, and shadowy, like Chinese figures on a wall. Therefore, with the help of the pen, we must define them a little, and give them some appearance of life.

Renato's father, the prince, Don Federigo, bore the name of his grandfather, the maker of the famous will, and though he was of the younger branch, and perhaps from the fact that he was born in affluence, we must admit that he bore his name and his title well. He was noble-looking in appearance, of easy manners and affable, with that diplomatic affability which makes people keep their place apparently without effort. He was faithful to the old government, though without too great warmth; he was moderately Bourbon; but his hostility to the government was of such a kind that a seat in the Senate, if offered in time, would have mollified him. Moreover, he was a perfect gentleman, a lover of horses, and a daring rider, though over fifty-two. He looked less, it is true, availing himself of the help of paint and pomatum to conceal the ravages of time. At heart he was an egotist, with a veneering of modern epicureanism; and the haughtiness of the old baron was so far softened, that by many his patronizing airs might be mistaken for amiability.

The princess was a Riario di Sant' Angelo, very excellent, but by no means remarkable for talent of any kind. She had been beautiful, of a delicate and consequently a short-lived style of beauty. Years, anxiety about her children, without any wish to put herself forward, and that natural drying-up that seems to go with much devotion, had altered her

greatly. She lived very retired, respected her husband, after having loved him more than he deserved while young; and divided her time and attention between church-going and her children, Renato and two girls; one of them already married, and the other, a younger girl, still at home. But these, as they take no prominent part in the story, need not be minutely described.

Of much more imposing appearance, and of greater consequence in Palazzo Caivano was Don Federigo's mother, an old lady of seventy-three, but who, had it not been for her silvery hair in thick curls, of the fashion of 1820, which betrayed her age, might have passed for the elder sister of her daughter-in-law. To see her, holding herself like a Roman empress, with her finely-chiselled features, to which wrinkles lent only additional dignity, one could easily understand her being called the loveliest among the lovely, not in the days of Lord Bentinck alone, but even under Francis I. and Ferdinand II. I mean Ferdinand II. as he was at first; for he reigned from 1830 for twenty-eight years on end, and often changed his style of government, to the great discomfort of his subjects.

A handsome old lady, rather stout, not very clever perhaps, but with a certain amount of good common sense, of few words and very ceremonious, like all who move in a higher position than the one they were born in, and therefore keep a greater guard over themselves—such, in the year of grace 1860, was Annella Schisano, or, to give her her proper style and titles, Donna Anna, Dowager Princess of Caivano, Duchess of Melito, Marchioness of Villareal and of

Candia, Countess of Altavilla, of Policastro, and of Locri.

That relationship with the Schisano family was the dark spot, the blot in the family. Not as far as Annella was concerned, for her great beauty and irreproachable manners had won her the esteem of every one. And then we know women are born to rise, and their antecedents are less regarded, provided they know how to conduct themselves in their new sphere. I speak of her relations, for three generations connected with the family as a sort of hangers-on, who could neither be treated like servants nor be recognized openly as relations.

Turiello Schisano, of course, did not inhabit the palazzo of his noble relations, and in his dealings with them—and they were daily—he showed all the respect possible. His womankind paid only a few ceremonious visits to Casa Caivano on grand occasions, always calling the old lady "Princess," and never making the smallest allusion to those ties of relationship which bound that Olympian goddess to humble individuals like themselves. But every day Signor Turiello had business of some kind to transact in Casa Caivano; and the relationship, though not talked about, could be ignored by no one, it kept cropping up constantly in obsequious familiarity on one side, and haughty familiarity on the other. These contradictory terms, it seems to me, express perfectly how constrained their mutual relations were.

How was it that these servants, who could not be treated as such, these relations, who could not even be asked to dine with them, how was it that they

remained in the service of the Prince of Caivano? As far as they were concerned it was simple enough; they had the management of the large estates belonging to the family. But the others, why had they not endeavoured to free themselves, when this state of things must have been especially irksome before they became accustomed to it?

There was some mystery in it all. Renato had never understood much about it, and, I may add, he had not thought much about it either. But now, after listening to the story told by Margherita's father, he began to think a great deal, even more than was needful. And he was perplexed, confused, and tormented by the doubt. Were all these people's grievances true? And, if they were not true, what part might he admit and what part reject?

Renato's seat at table was between his mother and grandmother. A little way off to the right of his grandmother, sat his father, that courteous gentleman, who even with his own family was strictly punctilious. In all the ways of the elders there was the same exquisite politeness, all the outward signs of consciences at ease; and as Renato's eyes wandered from one to the other, he asked himself how he could believe that under all this serenity there was hidden so foul an injustice. No; had there been a shadow of truth in all this horrid business, they could not all look so dignified and calm.

The old princess was extremely fond of Renato. He was her best beloved, in whom was concentrated all the love she bore to her husband and her son. The disturbed look in his face, which he accounted

for by saying that his head ached, made more impression on her than on any of the others.

"My dear Renato," the old lady said, with that affectionate interest which made her the real mistress of Casa Caivano, "you read too much, and you will injure your health."

"Mother dear," replied Renato, who often made use of this affectionate address to her, reserving "mamma" for the younger of the two ladies; "you know your grandson would be ashamed of his rank, if he didn't possess a little learning as well. A man is worth as much as he knows, and in my opinion that is his only worth."

This maxim was not very feudal; but the old princess found no fault with it for that.

"That's true," she said; "you are not like many other young men of the present day, who spend their time strolling between Chiaia and Toledo. You are like your grandfather, who could read the whole day long."

"Ah, indeed! he was always reading!"

Renato knew these things perfectly well, he had heard his grandmother tell them a thousand times; still he liked to hear them again. These reminiscences of his grandfather's life did him good, though he knew them well, and he liked especially to hear them then. A lover of books, he thought, could not be a villain.

"And tell me," he continued, "what did he read?"

"Ah, my dear Renato, I can't tell you much about it. It was always one of those large books out of the library at Melito. I," added the old lady, with a sigh, "had not studied enough to know them."

"You have a good heart, mother dear, and that is worth everything else."

The princess coloured with pleasure, as she drew Renato towards her.

"This boy's words," she said, after kissing him, "go right to one's heart."

Annella Schisano looked young again as she was speaking, and her emotion brought tears to her eyes.

Just then, Don Federigo came to take leave of his mother before starting for the Riviera di Chiaia, where his phaeton was ready for him.

"My dear mother," he said, with a smile, "you will spoil your Benjamin."

"Are you jealous?" the princess asked.

"And why not? As jealous as a father can be of his son."

With this he made her a deep bow, and received in return a kiss on his forehead from the old lady.

Renato saw the princess's silvery locks touching his father's grizzled ones. This little family scene brought about by himself, cheered him up, and he felt as if a weight had been taken off his heart.

"No, it isn't possible!" he said to himself; "and the lawyer will say the same, I am sure. I will convince them that they are wrong; I will prove that the will is an invention; that they have been taken in by some enemy of the family. As to their rights—because, after all, they have rights, if not in a court of law, still they have them—I shall propose a compromise, honourable to all parties."

A doubt suddenly crossed Renato's mind.

"But how?" he continued; "how shall I begin?

My father is a gentleman; but to speak to him about some things—point blank, too! And why should I do it, when the grandmother is here?"

That evening, on returning to his room, Renato did not stay there long, but taking up the bundle of documents hastened away to consult his friend Garantini, leaving however a message that he would bring Signor Ruggero an answer in the morning.

Signor Garantini, the lawyer, was a good-looking man, of about forty, with a pleasant, open face: he might even have passed for a good-looking young man, but for a slight baldness, which is common to most studious men. His ability and learning, especially in civil cases, were so great, that at the age of forty he was already among the foremost men at the Neapolitan Bar. He worked hard, without cutting himself off from society; hence his acquaintance, or rather friendship, with the Duke of Melito, though the latter was his junior by fifteen years.

"Good morning, Melito, or, rather, good evening," said Garantini, rising from his writing-table to shake hands with Renato. "Excuse me, my tongue has got a bad habit of saying good morning after dinner, and good evening after breakfast. I may expect to carry this weakness to the grave with me, like all the rest. But what is wrong? You look worried. And what is the meaning of that bundle of papers, that gives you the appearance of a travelling lawyer?"

"My dear Garantini, these papers will tell you everything. But first of all, have you time to spare?"

"The whole evening, and more if you require it. I meant to have spent it at the Fiorentini, where

there is a new play. But in this heat, it would be like taking a tepid bath. Pascariello!"

The servant appeared at once.

"Remember," continued Garantini, "we are not to be disturbed for any one."

"Yes, sir," said Pascariello, with one of his usual nods.

"Here we are then," said Garantini, when the door was closed. "Now, what's the matter? Your gloomy countenance makes me think it is something serious."

"My dear friend, it is nothing serious; or at least nothing urgent. But I am in a horrible difficulty."

"Hercules in difficulties!" exclaimed his friend. "But you look more like Adonis than Hercules, Melito. However, here I am, and if I can help you——"

"Yes, that's just what I want, advice against myself."

"Against yourself?"

"And against my own people," Renato added.

Garantini gave a start and looked at his young friend with astonishment, as if he felt doubtful whether he were in his senses or not.

CHAPTER XI.

IN CONTINUATION.

RENATO took no notice of Garantini's surprise. He raised his head with a jerk, and rubbed his forehead vigorously with the palm of his hand, as if he was trying to clear away the confusion from his brain, or the feeling of shame which kept him from beginning his painful story.

"Garantini," he said at last, "I have come to you because I know that you are not only a good lawyer, but a perfect gentleman."

Garantini thanked him with a nod.

"I have known you for two years," continued Renato, "and I seem to have known you since I was a child. You like young people, and you can tolerate their shortcomings; cool in your judgments, quiet like a man who knows his strength, kind and good-hearted; you feel neither envy nor rancour; when you like people, you make no secret of it; and when you despise them, you hold your tongue. Isn't it so?"

Garantini took Renato's hand in both of his, and pressed it hard.

"Well then," he continued, "from you a loyal, honest man, I am come to ask advice. I have a horrible doubt in my mind; to have admitted it and to listen to it is bad, because it makes me doubt those to whom I owe my life."

At this confession from his young friend, Garantini could not suppress an exclamation of surprise.

"Yes, I am my own accuser; it is wrong, very wrong what I am doing. Still if you had been educated, not only to respect your own people, but to respect also all that is good and true, honour and justice; and if you had been taught to consider these a part of your duty, tell me, what would you do in my place, having to choose between this duty and what is right, the most important thing of all?"

"You are a noble fellow," Garantini replied, affectionately. "Say rather, that this duty is a part of religion, and derives its strength from it; for in it everything good lives and moves, nor can there be any discord between the whole and any part of it. My dear friend, you sometimes hear antinomian opinions, very perplexing even to the cleverest. But it is just on those occasions one must show firmness and patience, not forgetting that harmony is as great a necessity in morality as in physics; and that, on a closer inspection, the contradictions are only apparent. My dear Melito, you speak to me like a man who is suffering from something, and I answer you like a philosopher. But let us see if we can't reconcile these contradictions. When people think as you do,

they are certainly superior to the common run. And then, *noblesse oblige*, we must consider the doubtful case carefully, weigh the *pros* and *cons*, and 'not take shadow for substance.'"

"That's just what I think," said Renato, in a melancholy voice, "and that's why I came to get some help from your science and excellent judgment. You shall hear then. And first of all, I need hardly say, that what I may tell you is in strict confidence."

Garantini put his hand to his heart.

"The secret of a friend and client," he said solemnly. "If you know me, you can have no doubt of me. And I may add that I am grateful to you for making me the confidant of a secret that is a trouble to you, and of a doubt that does you credit."

Renato untied the bundle of papers.

"This is my secret," he said. "It gives the history of a lawsuit. These are legal documents, belonging to poor people, who would find it impossible to procure copies; authentic documents, whose loss would be irreparable. And all these were put into my hands by the adversaries of my family."

"Altavilla against Altavilla!" he exclaimed. "A will case, perhaps?"

"Yes, and as I have already told you, I received the documents from the people concerned in it."

"If these papers are of any value, it was a generous action," the lawyer remarked. "Too much so, it seems to me; and besides, I have my doubts."

"Oh, you can't have any doubts about them!" Renato exclaimed, warmly. "They don't even know that I am an Altavilla."

The lawyer looked at him with a perplexed expression, between surprise and disapprobation.

"Oh, I understand what your look means," continued Renato, quickly; "you accuse me of concealing my name. But I assure you, on my honour, there was nothing wrong in my reasons for doing so; the worst of it is, that it has put me in a position intolerable to an honest man. However, I am the sufferer myself, and as you see, these papers were really entrusted to me, as they pass from my hands into yours. If these Altavillas have right on their side; if in the doings of my forefathers there was something wanting of that morality which you and I put above all law, you must tell me so plainly; and, forgetting that I, Duke of Melito, am your friend, that the Prince of Caivano is my father, you must undertake the defence of these poor people, and conduct the case for them against us."

Garantini's astonishment knew no bounds, and Renato's conduct seemed perfectly superhuman.

"And people say that chivalry is a thing of the past!" he cried, in great excitement. "Behold Renato Altavilla ready to give them the lie, these slanderers of the age we live in. My dear Renato," he proceeded, subduing his enthusiasm, "forgive me this outburst. I thought highly of you always; now I admire you, and I may say to you what Dante said to the valiant Provençal Romeo—

> 'E, se il mondo sapesse il cor ch' egli ebbe,
> Assai lo loda, e più lo loderebbe.'

I leave out a verse in the middle, not applicable to

the present case," he added, as a marginal note; for he liked precision in everything, and would not have any one think that he took liberties with Dante.

Renato, notwithstanding his gloom, could not help smiling.

"I will add to your verse," he said, "if I should have to go like Raimondo Berlinghieri's Romeo:

'Begging my bread from door to door,'

it shall never be said that I enjoyed quietly a fortune that didn't belong to me."

"Easy with that 'doesn't belong to me!' Let us first see where the right lies. Explain the case to me, while I am arranging these papers according to their dates."

"This is a summary of the case," Renato began. "In 1805, according to the claimants, my great-grandfather made an entail in favour of his eldest son. My great-grandfather died in 1815, while his eldest son was from home. When he returned he expected to take possession of the property; but the second son maintained that it should be divided equally between the two brothers, as their father had died intestate. In the meantime, for political reasons, the elder brother was obliged to go into exile. The second brother, my grandfather, married Anna Schisano, still living, the daughter (here Renato spoke in a low voice, as if he was afraid of being heard) of his major-domo. The claimants maintain that this unequal match was one of the consequences of Don Federigo's will being done away with. In

this way they try to explain the disappearance of an important document, the one establishing the entail."

"But if there is no such document," Garantini interrupted, "their assertion goes for nothing."

"Certainly, it would go for nothing. But the claimants," proceeded Renato, drawing a long breath, "can produce an entry in the notary's books, to the effect that the document had been signed during the year 1805. Now let us go back to the story. The property was not divided; the elder son was obliged to go into exile, and the government confiscated everything belonging to him, and bestowed it on his younger brother. You will tell me what you think of this from a legal point of view, when you have read the sentence requiring the plaintiffs to prove their legitimate descent from Don Federigo, and to prove by new documents that the will had been made away with."

"What is the date of this sentence?" Garantini asked.

The answer to this question he discovered for himself among the papers lying on his desk.

"Here it is, in 1842. And how is it that for so long——"

"You see," Renato interrupted, "there were appeals and petitions as usual, and the sentence did not come into force till 1844."

"And from that day to this has the question lain dormant?"

"My dear Garantini," Renato replied, "in this year the claimant, for political reasons, had to fly the kingdom. In consequence of the events of 1848, he returned to his native country; but that was not a

time for lawsuits. Besides, he had no time to do anything, for the troubles of 1849 drove him again into exile, and he did not return till 1860, poor and little inclined to hope. I should add that the lawsuit was not begun by him, but by his mother, while he was still a minor, and that he never understood much about it. Then the lawyer who had conducted the case up to 1844 was dead before 1860, and Signor Ruggero Altavilla (for so the claimant is called), before running the risk of a second trial, even supposing he had money for this, wished to have some advice as to how far he was in the right, what he should do, and what documents he ought to produce, to support his cause properly."

"And he turned to you for counsel?"

"To me," Renato said, colouring.

"Without knowing you?"

"Without knowing me. But that is immaterial. It is a fatality that this counsel should be given by me, and I can't help seeing the finger of Providence in it," added Renato, excitedly. "Be it chance, destiny, or Providence, an appeal has been made to my honesty; and I cannot turn a deaf ear."

"With these ideas I see that you would not entertain the idea of offering your adversary some money, in case his claims had any foundation."

Renato made a gesture of prompt refusal.

"So I thought!" continued Garantini. "A cavalier of the good old times! Moreover, whether you wished it or not, you could do nothing while your father, the head of the family, is living."

Renato gave a shiver as he thought of his father.

His father was not a man to be trifled with. The Prince of Caivano had excellent manners, with a courteous, pleasant way of talking; but with this soft exterior he had a will like iron.

"Look here, Garantini," he said, with this disturbing thought still uppermost; "I certainly cannot put myself in my father's place, and I don't know even whether I should have the courage to face him and to tell him that only a part of what belongs to us is our own. But what I do know is, that notwithstanding all the most sacred feelings and considerations in the world, if these people have right on their side, I will look at it openly and fairly, no matter how it may affect me."

"Quite right," Garantini remarked. "Let us begin then by examining whether they have any right on their side, and if the sentence is a bit of injustice of the judges under the late government. Here," he added, turning over the papers which he had arranged on his desk, "this is the indictment of the dispossessed against the holders of the property; this other is the power of attorney. These are the summonses and petitions, one after another. And here is the sentence; let us see the grounds. Well, there is nothing to object to in that!" exclaimed Garantini, after eight or ten minutes spent in studying it, and muttering the words between his teeth; "for some inexplicable reasons, the legal document was missing to prove the marriage of Corrado Altavilla with the Countess Tolstoi, the mother of the claimant. As to the will, the claimant maintains that it has been lost, and produces an authenticated copy of the notary's

entry. But that is not enough, and the sentence requiring him to look for other documents, or additional proofs, is quite in order. Then, what is this bit of folded paper? Ah, it is an affirmation sworn by Don Gennaro de Angelis, chaplain in the Neapolitan army, and Colonel Filippo di San Filippo, his brother officer, as witnesses of the marriage of Corrado Altavilla in the village of Borodino. This is a most important document. But why was it not produced? Ah! I see, it is of the 15th of July, 1844, a month after the sentence was given. See, Renato, the claimants were preparing to give the proofs required."

"And a few days afterwards, Ruggero Altavilla was obliged to fly!" Renato remarked, shaking his head sadly.

"Now let us see if there is anything about the will. Here is the minute of a letter. It is Ruggero Altavilla's lawyer who writes; and it, too, is later than the sentence. The lawyer advises Ruggero to go to Melito and to get the evidence of the son of the notary, who had received Don Federigo's will. See, here is a hint as to a visit of Vito Schisano's to the library after the old prince's death. Ah! and a strong box was broken open. What a pity that all this happened in 1815! But let us count a little. We are now in 1868. Fifty-three years ago then. The son of the notary might possibly be alive."

"He is a notary too, and he has taken his father's place," said Renato. "I know him; he is an old man of seventy-five, or thereabouts."

"We are on the right scent then. But will he remember? Will he speak? That's the point. More-

over," Garantini added, "it is a bad business! Thieves, and probably even informers! Because there is a strange coincidence here, indeed I may say two. Corrado, as soon as he begins to complain, is decoyed into appearing as an adherent of Murat's, and then chased on the mountains like a wild beast. Ruggero, while he is trying to collect the proofs required by the tribunal—— But excuse me, Renato," Garantini said, suddenly breaking off as he detected a look of displeasure on the face of his young friend; "I was not thinking."

"Oh, speak freely, give evil-doers what they deserve, wherever you find them!" Renato cried, impetuously. "You are right; it is a horrid business, and I said so to myself this morning as I was reading Ruggero Altavilla's papers for the first time. And look, Garantini, I have gone farther than you. What do you think of the marriage of the other Ruggero, Don Federigo's second son? Is not that an aggravating circumstance, almost like the result of an infamous contract? And who made away with the will, I should like to know, who made away with it?"

"Vito Schisano, of course! Either he, or no one."

"But supposing he had an accomplice?"

"No clue to that now, probably; and why sit in judgment on a man now, when he is dead and can't defend himself?"

"But then, having profited by the confiscation of Corrado's property, what is that but having a hand in the ruin of that gallant soldier?"

"My dear fellow," Garantini replied, "let us not exaggerate! Remember the age and the ideas com-

mon then, and especially we should consider how natural it was that your grandfather should dislike seeing any part of the property being confiscated for the benefit of the treasury. There's a proverb, you know, 'Never look a gift horse in the mouth.' And why should they, Altavilla, upon what had always belonged to the family? Besides, your great-grandfather was a devoted adherent of the Bourbons. There were many such then," Garantini added, as if to soften his words; "and there was a time, during the French invasion, when siding with the old government had a look of patriotism. It may seem strange, but so it was. A philosopher may perhaps free himself from the prejudices of his age, and judge men and things impartially, but for one living in their midst it is impossible; and there must have been a day when, to lovers of their country, a Bourbon may have seemed the lesser evil. In 1815, I mean, not in 1844, when the danger of a foreign occupation was past, and the Bandiera attempt was the beginning of an Italian revolution."

"Well then," cried Renato, "you have said it yourself! In 1844 they should have restored the half of the property unjustly acquired."

"You are exaggerating again," replied Garantini. "My dear friend, remember that not your grandfather, but your father, was then in possession, and from the force of habit his rights must have appeared to him perfectly legitimate. You know what his opinions are in politics, and how much more decided they must have been then. And besides, do you know what form your relations' demand took? Did

they not demand the whole property on the strength of a will which is not to be had, and the existence of which may be honestly denied, when people are really ignorant of it?"

Renato followed with breathless interest the reasoning of his friend.

"Ah, thanks, thanks!" he broke forth then, for he could appear as advocate against his family no longer. "Your reasoning is like my own. But I was afraid that in my case feeling might blind my judgments; and I required to hear the same arguments from a man like you. Because, you know, it is painful to have to think ill of one's parents, and to suspect them of dishonourable conduct." As he was speaking he was evidently greatly agitated, and tears, partly the effects of feeling, partly of shame, rose to his eyes.

"Poor Renato!" Garantini exclaimed, taking him affectionately by the hand; "if you knew how I admire you. And now, I cannot swear, because I may be mistaken, but speaking plainly, as you, like a gentleman, wished me to do, I think Ruggero Altavilla has a case. There is no will, but we have the entry in the notary's book, and all the proofs which we may be able to get about Vito Schisano's visit to the dead man's study. As to Ruggero's being the legitimate descendant of Corrado, we have the certificate, sworn to by the priest who married him to the Countess Tolstoi, and by San Filippo as a witness; and that is more than sufficient. In short, though I say it with regret, Ruggero Altavilla may begin the lawsuit again, and he may win."

"And will you undertake the case?"

"If you desire me."

"I entreat you," Renato said; "it is my duty as an honest man, and I will do it thoroughly."

"So be it," replied the lawyer. "I will undertake it from similar motives. But the expenses will not be light. Of course I am not speaking of fees——"

"I undertake the expense, provided you don't tell Signor Ruggero Altavilla. You need say nothing to him about this; in fact, it is better he should think that the expenses won't be very great. It is strange, isn't it?" added Renato, with a convulsive laugh. "I shall pay for my own loss. But it is the work of destiny, and so let it be. I invoked it myself, and I was heard with a vengeance."

"What do you mean?" Garantini asked, raising his eyebrows.

Renato made no reply to the question of his friend, and asked him another instead. "Garantini, you were at the dinner at the Frisio rock, four months ago?"

"Yes, certainly; what of that?"

"Do you remember our return?"

"By sea? Yes, perfectly well."

"We passed close to a boat with a young lady in it——"

"Waving and nodding to a young fellow clinging to the rigging of a brigantine. We were struck by her extreme beauty. She was a Hebe, an Erigone; no, for we were at sea, a nymph, the most lovely of the Nereids—

'Quarum, quae forma pulcherrima, Deiopeiam,'

in the words of Virgil. You see, Renato, I remember her, and my classics too."

"Well," replied Renato, without heeding the lawyer's reminiscences of the classics, "that was Ruggero Altavilla's daughter—the girl that I, Errico di Sarno, am in love with."

"Errico di Sarno! What has this Errico to do with it?"

"I told you already that Signor Ruggero had asked me for advice, not knowing me by my real name. In his house I am Errico di Sarno. You ought to know everything, my dear Garantini; be a loyal friend and keep my secret."

"All right; but now, how do you mean to manage? One day or other they will have to know it. And with your honourable feelings, my dear Renato, should you not——"

"I know what you mean; I ought to throw off the incognito. So I will certainly—after a little."

"My dear friend, the sooner the better."

"You needn't ask me. All that was in my power I have done. See, Garantini, without any hesitation I can contemplate the possible ruin of my family. But don't ask me to go just at once to these good people and tell them I am a liar. Don't ask me to shut myself out, perhaps for ever, from their house. Give me time to think and to arrange. Who knows? perhaps, when the lawsuit has been begun, and when they can't have any doubts of my sincerity in this wretched business, I shall be able to say to them, 'I am Renato Altavilla, Duke of Melito, with a heart of iron towards himself and his own people, because he felt himself impelled by the motto of his ancestors, "Digne."'"

"You are putting off the trouble, instead of having done with it," Garantini remarked. "But I understand, you have courage for a great sacrifice, and you haven't enough for a small humiliation. Excuse me for speaking like this, so openly. However, you have done so much already, you are such an excellent fellow, that I can't feel any doubts about you, or of your judgment. I, too, am in love, at a respectful distance of course, with the girl you are in love with, and who one day will be yours, I hope."

Renato gave a deep sigh, expressive of many fears and ardent hopes.

"Well, what is wrong?" Garantini asked him.

"I am thinking of my father," Renato said. "How can I ever persuade him? And how can I ask for the hand of Margherita when her father's rights are acknowledged, and the tables are turned? Don't you see, don't you understand, what a painful position I am in? Do you think, with my way of thinking, not in the least likely to alter, there is any chance of success?"

"Well, just now, I do not," replied Garantini, in some perplexity; "but patience! The Arab says, 'Allah Kerim;' the Italian says, 'Do your duty, be the consequences what they may.' At any rate, you have a devoted friend and counsellor in me, whatever may happen. And now, if you will send Signor Ruggero Altavilla to me, I am in my study every morning from nine till eleven."

"But please, my secret—with him——"

"Is sacred, never fear. And then, when I have heard Signor Ruggero, I shall ask for an interview with the Prince of Caivano."

"And wherefore?"

"You need not trouble yourself; it is my concern."

"To come to terms, perhaps?" cried Renato, in alarm.

"No," replied the lawyer, after a moment's pause. "Moreover, can't you trust me? Do you think, whatever I might propose, that it would bring discredit on your name?"

"You are right," said Renato, in a quieter tone. "And now, thank you for all you have done, and for all you intend to do."

Renato came away from Garantini's rooms in a state of great perturbation. The fresh air revived him and settled his mind a little. He once more went up the Via Toledo, and so on, the way he had come, and in ten minutes he found himself in Donna Romita lane. A glance at certain windows on the fifth storey he could not deny himself, and Renato gave it as soon as he had come to the corner, and it became possible to do so. There was light in Ruggero's studio, and, at that very moment, Renato thought he saw the shadow of a slight figure appear and disappear.

"It is Margherita!" he said to himself, while his heart beat faster at this fleeting apparition.

He looked at his watch. It was a little after ten; rather late, certainly, but Renato had an excuse. Therefore, instead of stopping at the fourth landing as usual every evening, he went up another twenty steps, and knocked at the door of the fifth.

Margherita gave a little cry of surprise and pleasure at the sight of Renato, at this unexpected hour; and

Renato felt rejoiced at all he had done, and forgot in a moment all he had suffered.

"Signorina," he stammered, confused by that rush of feeling which can be felt but not described, "tell your father that Signor Garantini——"

"But please come in," interrupted Margherita.

And in still greater confusion, she turned to call her father.

"Papa, it is Signor Errico," she said; and in her silvery voice that name, Errico, sounded so harmonious, that he really regretted it should have been Renato.

The old gentleman came from his studio to greet his visitor with a smile on his lips, and an expression of pleasure in his eyes. The doubts and fears of the morning disappeared as if by enchantment, when his daughter announced him.

"Ah, is it you, Signor Errico! Come in and sit down, please."

"Don't let me disturb you, at this hour. I have so little to say."

"No, no; after climbing up here, you must stay at least for five minutes as a penance."

"You mean as a reward," replied Renato, taking advantage of his opportunity; "and I shall come to the point at once, in the fashion of an unskilful orator. Your case is a good one. Signor Garantini, one of the best lawyers at our bar, undertakes to conduct it with all the skill he possesses."

"Ah!" cried Margherita, blushing with pleasure, and looking at Renato with a grateful expression, as if it were thanks to him that the case was good. "Then all these papers are worth something?"

"A proof, Signorina; a full and complete proof of the rights of your family. At least, Garantini thinks so, provided some bit of evidence can be supplied; and that, I think, should not be difficult."

"And my father, who, for so many years would hardly believe in it, and was almost ready to throw the papers in the fire——"

"Not all, my dear girl, not all. Among others I should have kept the certificate of my father's marriage. You see, Signor Errico," continued the old artist, with a noble candour, "during the lawsuit, which was managed by that excellent lawyer, Signor Cafiero, I was young and heedless; I never understood the matter clearly. One thing only I understood, one thing grieved me, and that was any doubt being cast on the legality of my father's marriage, and on the honour of my dear mother. I did not waste a thought on anything else, only on this one point. As to the rest I was indifferent; and even now it is not the love of wealth which made me ask your advice and assistance. I am anxious to leave to my children the honourable name of my forefathers, to which, though I have added no lustre, neither have I disgraced it in any way. And you say that your friend, this lawyer——"

"Expects to see you to-morrow in his rooms, Palazzo Barbaia Via Toledo, on the third storey, between nine and eleven to-morrow. I left the papers with him, and he will arrange with you all about beginning the lawsuit again."

"My dear girl," said Signor Ruggero, in a tone of gentle melancholy, "I fear that the little bit of land

which we still possess in Casoria must be sold to meet the expenses of the lawsuit."

"Oh, you need have no fear about that," Renato hastily interposed; "the expenses won't be great. Signor Garantini is an excellent man, he knows your circumstances, and he will ask for no fees till the case is finished."

"And you thought about that even?" cried the old gentleman, warmly. "Signor Errico di Sarno, how shall we ever discharge our obligations to you? Certainly, if gratitude——"

"No, for heaven's sake, don't thank me," interrupted Renato. "Before long I too shall require all the indulgence possible from you."

An irresistible impulse made him speak in this way. And much was conveyed by these few words, of which Margherita could easily understand part, the only part, indeed, which she could understand of this enigmatical speech.

She cast down her eyes, as if she would fain have hidden the confusion produced by them. If it had been daylight Renato might have seen her face with a rosy flush on it, making her look like Erigone, the lovely and pious daughter of Icarus, as the poetical lawyer had suggested.

Even Signor Ruggero understood that part of the enigma. We know that Margherita had already confided her secret to her father.

"Poor things," he said to himself, while Margherita was showing Renato out.

Renato ventured to press Margherita's hand, and to raise it to his lips. To this she made no opposition.

"A heart of gold," he murmured, looking at her lovingly, and preparing to repeat the homage.

"Digne!" she added, with a gentle gravity that stopped him at once, filling his heart at the same time with all sorts of blissful feelings.

CHAPTER XII.

THE WRATH OF ACHILLES.

NOT many days had passed since Renato's magnanimous doings, when Signor Palmanova had one of perhaps the saddest and most trying mornings that had ever fallen to his lot in this vale of tears. At least, we may draw this conclusion from the violent way with which he rang his door-bell, his precipitate entrance, the rolling of his eyes and his angry mutterings—all evident signs of great wrath, which would inevitably burst forth as soon as he was in his own house, far from the eyes and jeering of the outer world.

The unusual noise made by her father on entering the house, brought Nunziata running up to him.

"What is the matter, papa?" she cried, seeing her father apparently as mad as Orlando.

But her father made her no answer, and went on dashing about the room, storming like a Turk.

"Good God! some misfortune," continued the girl, trembling all over.

"Misfortunes indeed!" muttered Signor Martino.

"If that were all! I wish the Via del Piliero were burning at both ends, and that the harbour were full of blazing petroleum."

Nunziata could see that it was not in his business that matters had gone wrong, so she stood breathless and trembling, waiting for a good opportunity of making her escape from the room. But Signor Martino, though he would not reply properly to his daughter's inquiries, had no idea of keeping his grief to himself.

"Misfortunes indeed! misfortunes!" he continued, suddenly turning and stopping before his daughter, with the look of an infuriated bull. "You might know what has happened to me, because it is your fault."

"Mine?" exclaimed Nunziata, her alarm giving place to astonishment.

"Yes; with your friendship with that foolish girl."

"Margherita?"

"Yes, with her," thundered Signor Martino; "and with that schemer, her father, who thinks himself a prince already. A prince like Pulcinella, without a farthing in his pocket!"

"But tell me, papa dear, what has happened?"

"What has happened is this. That with your childishness, your father, Martino Palmanova, one of the first shipowners in Naples, has made a fool of himself—an absolute fool! It is enough to make one mad! And then these cursed gloves——"

Signor Martino, as he twisted his hands convulsively, was reminded by a sound of leather tearing that he still had gloves on; a beautiful pair of new

light gloves, that went well with an overcoat with rich lapels. The tear had begun, and in his fury he did the rest, dragging off the buttons, tearing the leather, then squeezing them up and throwing them into the corner, with a gesture that might have been copied from Jupiter Tonans.

"But after all, papa," Nunziata succeeded in saying, "if you won't tell me—can she have refused you?"

"Can she, indeed! With the greatest coolness in the world. Now what do you think of your friend?"

"I think she has behaved very badly, after all that she said to me."

"Ah, indeed! And what did she say to you?"

"To tell you the truth, she said nothing; but silence gives consent."

"That proverb is a lie; silence means nothing. And I trusted to you like a fool, and gave her an opportunity of saying 'No.'"

"Margherita did?"

"Margherita or her father; it's all the same."

"How could she? To refuse you!"

"Yes, you may say so. What do they think themselves? And after all my kindness to beggars like them; because, after all, we didn't want them. But, after all," concluded Signor Palmanova, whose stock of adverbs seemed limited, "you shall never put your foot in that house again."

"You needn't fear," said Nunziata, who also felt deeply offended, "I will never speak to her again; and if they expect me to marry Corrado now——"

"Corrado! what is all that?" cried Signor Palmanova, raising his eyebrows.

Nunziata repented, but too late, of her heedlessness, and now had no resource but tears.

"What is this? I must know—do you hear? I must know. Did you promise anything without asking your father's advice? And look here, my girl, when I say advice, I mean will, because I am not like a father in a play, and if you imagine for a moment that I——"

"No, papa, no!" interrupted she, in a voice choked with sobs. "I have promised nothing. Corrado has gone to America to make his fortune, and to return soon to ask your consent. That's all; you know everything now."

"Ah, indeed! as if gold was to be found in America in shovelfuls at all the corners of the streets! And you believe him, you fool, and you stay at home to nurse the cat! But, I can tell you, if you have notions of that kind in your head, I am here to put them out of it. You will, before long, be married to a fine young fellow, rich and good-looking, good enough for a duchess. Oh, you won't marry him! Even if I had to send to China for him, I would find him, and the Altavillas may content themselves as they like!"

"But, papa——"

"What? You would refuse? I am good-natured; but if you cross me——"

"No, papa, I am not talking of refusing," the girl said, alarmed at her father's expression; "I have promised nothing yet. And then, if Margherita won't have you, I will have nothing more to say to them. They are all horrid and ungrateful——"

"After all the friendliness we have shown these people!" continued Signor Martino who could not get over it. "Because, you see, we have always been kind to them. Only six months ago the baker came to ask our cook in confidence if, from fortnight to fortnight, he could trust these penniless princes, and I sent him word that he might. However, I must confess, they have always paid their way; but then, if they have credit, they owe it to me. Ungrateful wretches! They shall pay for it; they shall indeed. My name is not Martino Palmanova if they don't! And that old dotard—with his aristocratic haughtiness—that old dotard, talking about his hopes! He imagines he is going to get a grand estate! He is to bring a lawsuit against the Prince of Caivano, his cousin, he says. Do you know anything of this flight of fancy?"

"No; Margherita never said a word about it to me."

"Indeed; how close she is!"

"And for some time I have seen very little of her; she is scarcely ever at home; always with a neighbour on the lower storey."

"With the owner of the rooms? Now I understand——"

"What?" asked Nunziata, who had her suspicions.

"Oh, a fine young fellow; whatever brought him here? He must be a lodger of Signora Concetta's. Is not that her name?"

"Yes; but how did you come to know——"

"I saw him as I came down from the Altavillas' rooms. He was at the door of the fourth storey, with

the key in his hand, just going in, and he stopped to look at me, with such a stare, that I felt inclined to box his ears."

Signor Martino accompanied these words with a flourish of his hand through the air.

"And you say he is handsome?" continued Nunziata.

"Handsome—yes, to a certain extent. He has a pair of audacious-looking eyes that forebode no good, and he is pale, extremely pale; indifferent health, I should think. And then, what else? The usual whiskers, curly hair, and grand clothes. Oh, she will be happy; we shall see how it will be. As usual, these penniless girls, with notions in their heads above their station in life, come to a bad end. I can assure you they come to a bad end. Of course, you are not to enter their house again; I don't wish to have you ruined with her bad example."

"I am not going, papa, indeed; I sha'n't even go to the window."

"Quite right, and they shall see what it is to have refused a Palmanova, one of the first shipowners of Naples. Here, Nunziata, take this coat; it is burning my shoulders. Princess of Caivano! Yes, take the principality; it is there under your hands! But now I think of it, I ought to know this Prince of Caivano. Yes, I remember; I know his secretary, Signor Salvatore Schisano. He has had some dealings with me. I shall go and ask him a little about this lawsuit. Imagine those people princes! And rich! They wouldn't have been all this time about it if they had a ghost of a chance."

In this way Signor Martino blew off the steam as he was divesting himself of the garments which had availed him so little. And his pretty daughter, as she thought over Margherita's refusal, felt as angry as he did.

But it is time to leave the Palmanovas. Even the worthy Signor Martino, after putting on his everyday clothes, though without being able to recover his temper, left the house, to attend to his business as he said. But we must not believe him entirely; for, instead of threading the lanes and alleys leading to Basso Porto, where he was to be seen daily on his way to the Via del Piliero, he set off at a round pace through the wide streets leading to the Via di Toledo.

It was to the house of Signor Turiello that Signor Palmanova was going. Turiello was the father of two nice-looking daughters, and it was the great wish of his heart that one of these should become Duchess of Melito, and eventually Princess of Caivano. By this means his influence in the family would be confirmed, and there was already a good precedent for such a marriage. But the difficulty was which of the two young ladies should be promoted to this honour. In this uncertainty they were almost quarrelling with one another for the imaginary position. Renato had been in the habit of paying them occasional visits, and occasionally placing his theatre-box at their disposal. But further than this he had never gone. Indeed of late, for reasons of which we are cognisant, he had neglected even to call upon them. Meanwhile Garantini had taken his first steps in the matter of the lawsuit. He had had an interview with Don

Federigo, and on behalf of his client proposed a division of the property. This the Prince absolutely refused even to consider, though, on hearing of his cousin's poverty, and learning that the legitimacy of Signor Ruggero's birth was now incontestably established, he offered him the sum of ten thousand ducats. But Don Federigo would not admit any claim based upon his grandfather's will—a will which, even supposing it to have ever existed, of which there was no real proof, must be supposed to have been destroyed by the old prince when he found his elder son to have adopted the liberal and subversive opinions of the age. To this reasoning Garantini could offer no opposition, and the negotiations dropped.

Signor Turiello, as has already been mentioned, was an acquaintance of Palmanova's. The two had had business transactions together some time back, and were in the habit of shaking hands when they met in the street. Now ever since Signor Turiello had met Gaetano leaving Renato's rooms he had suspected that something was up. The young duke, it was very plain, hardly ever slept at home. This was only too evident; but what mystery lurked beneath this fact the worthy steward had not yet been able to determine.

On being told that Signor Palmanova desired an interview, Signor Turiello at once concluded that it was upon some business matter, and great was his surprise when his visitor began to speak about the lawsuit brought against Don Federigo by his cousin Ruggero.

"Yes," said Palmanova, as he took a seat close to

the steward, "I should like to know if the claims of this penniless Altavilla have any foundation."

"Signor Martino," said the steward, looking very serious, "these are very delicate matters, and I can't enter on them without knowing your reasons for asking."

"Quite right—quite right," stammered Signor Martino, who had not foreseen this difficulty; "but you may believe me, dear Signor Turiello, when I assure you that I have no interest in the matter, except simple curiosity. With these Altavillas, I am rather intimate—or, properly speaking, was——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Signor Turiello. "You know them?"

"Yes, a pair of fools, father and daughter; they think a great deal of themselves, as if they were on the point of becoming millionaires. And I should very much like to know if there is any truth in it."

"Well, if they have no other lights than this, my dear Signor Martino, they may go to bed in the dark, you may depend upon it," replied Signor Turiello, shrugging his shoulders. "These people found their claims on a will that does not exist, and never did exist."

"But what hope can they have, then? And the lawyers—because without lawyers they certainly can't do anything; have they not consulted a lawyer?"

"How should I know? Your words prove to me, Signor Martino, that of lawyers in search of clients there are over a thousand, and that people like them could find a hole in the Lord's Prayer."

"Of course, just to waste money. But in this case

they will find out their mistake, because, except a little bit of land, his wife's portion, Ruggero Altavilla has nothing, and his son I had to send to America 'gratis et amore Dei.'"

"Are you great friends with these Altavillas?" Schisano asked.

"I have been, unfortunately."

"Ah! they fleeced you?"

"Never mind," said Palmanova, who had no desire to be explicit; "you see, when you live next the miller you may expect to have flour flying about."

"By the way, where do they live?"

"I told you, quite close to me. My house is in the Via Nilo."

A cloud passed over Signor Turiello's countenance, as, for some months past, that Via Nilo had been a great annoyance to him.

The reader may remember that Signor Salvatore had heard from Gaetano, the man of many callings, how the Duke of Melito had sent him to make inquiries about a girl from those very parts. Since that day the duke had been as mysterious as a conspirator or a lover, and had hardly ever been home at night. At first Signor Salvatore thought that it was some passing fancy; then he began to suspect there was some entanglement, and wished greatly to get hold of Gaetano to get some more information. But Gaetano, who had no further occasion to speak to the duke, had not come in his way, and Signor Salvatore's wish was still ungratified. You may imagine, then, how Signor Turiello pricked up his ears at his friend's words.

"Via Nilo!" he repeated, as an introduction.

"Yes; and the Altavillas live in Donna Romita lane, on the fifth floor. We can see them from the windows of our servants' rooms," added Signor Martino, with a contemptuous air. "They are as poor as poor can be, but as proud as Spanish grandees."

"The girl, if she is good-looking, will get a husband."

"She is certainly handsome; but if she wants a husband, she has set about it in a bad way. Imagine, young men go to the house——"

"Oh, come now!"

"At least one young gentleman, for one there certainly is, and he lives on the fourth floor in lodgings. It looks bad—it looks bad; but that is no one's concern except her own and her old fool of a father's."

"No, no, Signor Martino, it concerns us a little too. Is it not well always to have a spy in the enemy's camp? And as I see they have annoyed you in some way——"

"Oh, that's nothing as far as I am concerned."

"If you have any claims, the prince will settle them," said Signor Turiello, hoping he had struck the right chord.

"No, I have no claims, not I; I am not such a fool!"

"Excuse me, and forget what I have said. And this youth, what is he like?"

"How can I tell you? A young fellow like all the rest, and indeed I don't know what she saw in him. Middle height, like me, dark hair, dark eyes——"

"Black whiskers, an oval chin," continued Signor

Turiello, with a laugh, "and nothing remarkable about him at all, just like the passports!"

"It seems to be a good joke!"

"Certainly, certainly," replied Signor Turiello, smiling, though he was raging underneath. "And tell me, have you ever seen this fellow near?"

"About as near as I am to you, a few hours ago, at the door of his own rooms."

"On the same stairs as the Altavillas, then?"

"Exactly. But excuse me, Signor Turiello, may I ask the reason of all these questions?"

"You will hear directly; we are friends, and I don't wish to keep any secrets from you. But, on the other hand, you must not keep any from me."

"Quite right," said Palmanova, nodding assent.

"Then to begin with, will you tell me why, a few hours before coming to ask me about these Altavillas, who are no longer friends of yours, you were on the stairs, and probably had been with the Altavillas? Mind, my friend," added the knowing old fellow, as he remarked a troubled expression on the face of the other, "confidence for confidence, and secret for secret."

Signor Martino became red with annoyance. But this was not the time to keep anything back.

"Oh, I will tell you exactly how it is, and then you can laugh as much as you like. I was fool enough to propose to that Altavilla girl."

"And she wouldn't have you?"

"Exactly," replied Palmanova, shaking his head, and looking extremely uncomfortable.

"They don't know, certainly, the mistake they

have made. Signor Martino, in exchange for their alliance, I offer you mine."

And Signor Turiello rose from his seat without waiting for an answer. Signor Martino followed him with his eyes, not exactly understanding how and in what manner his alliance could be of service to Signor Turiello.

The latter in the meantime had gone to a bracket, taken down an album, and opening it near the beginning, presented it to Signor Palmanova.

"Is this young gentleman at all like the one you saw a few hours ago?"

"It is! it is!" exclaimed Signor Martino, as soon as he had glanced at the photograph shown him by Turiello. "But how do you come to have his photograph here?"

"Nothing more natural; it is the portrait of Don Renato, Duke of Melito, the eldest son of the Prince of Caivano."

"Eh, what do you tell me? The son of——"

He could say no more, his astonishment was so great. Don Bartolo in the first act of the "Barber of Seville" was not more astonished or vacant-looking than Signor Martino.

"Well, Signor Martino, you look surprised!"

"I should think so. It is past my comprehension. They are at law with the father for some millions, and the son makes love to the daughter at the same time. You must admit that it is enough to puzzle any one."

"Excuse me, but I don't agree with you," replied Schisano. "If they thought of bringing an action against the prince, with so little hope of success, it

was natural they should think of getting something to strengthen their claims ; some intelligence in the enemy's camp. As yet, I don't know how the duke could play into their hands, but it is certain they have caught him somehow. I suspected it as soon as you began to talk of a mysterious young gentleman in lodgings. For some time I have been watching the duke's movements. This is my secret, my dear Signor Martino. I am much attached to the Caivano family, my excellent employers, and may I say my relations too," he added, in parenthesis, "and I don't choose that these people should entrap the young duke. Now you, Signor Martino, are of course a gentleman ? "

"I consider myself such."

"Well, you must help me to circumvent these people. All fathers of families should league themselves against such villains, who would sell—— There, we need not say too much out of Christian charity, though people like these would make the very saints say hard words. Let us consider how to circumvent them."

"And with their appearance," exclaimed Signor Martino, who could not get over it. "She, with a face like a Madonna ! Her father like a saint in a niche ! "

"Well, appearances are deceptive, dear Signor Martino, very deceptive ! You know these people by their deeds. Therefore, we are agreed ; this scandal must be put an end to."

"Certainly," cried Signor Palmanova, who felt as if he were gaining his ends ; "and I should have spoken my mind to Signor Ruggero Altavilla myself, if I hadn't sworn never to put my foot in his house again."

"You were wrong, my dear friend, wrong! You must go back."

"I? after such an affront?"

"Yes, you. After that affront. Signor Martino, have you any spirit, or have you not? And, after all, have they any cause to triumph? Have you not paid them a compliment, when you proposed to the girl? I know many fathers who would consider themselves in the seventh heaven. They said 'No,' so much the worse for them; they might remember that men like you are not to be found at every corner of the street."

"Signor Ruggero did thank me for the honour I had done them."

"I thought so. Well then, your dignity is all right, and they remain what they are, either fools or villains. If they are fools, we needn't imitate them; if they are villains, we must unmask them. You have also a daughter, and the Prince of Caivano has a son. Do you follow me? What happens to him to-day, might happen to you to-morrow."

"Don't mention it, for pity's sake!" cried Signor Palmanova, who thought of Corrado at that moment. "Tell me instead what you wish me to do, and I will do it; I give you my word I will."

"Look here, then; we must plan something superfine; something really good. But this is not the place," added Schisano; "the very walls have ears, and women should know nothing of men's secrets."

With these words, he got up to conduct his visitor somewhere else. They wished to talk in the greatest privacy; let us not intrude on them. Subsequent events will show what their plans were.

CHAPTER XIII.

A LEFT-HANDED BLOW.

THE case of Altavilla *v.* Altavilla went on, quickly, for Garantini was working at it vigorously. The Prince of Caivano was furious, and in his house not even the resemblance of its former peace remained—that resemblance which so often serves to conceal the crosses of the so-called great ones of the earth. He had haughtily refused any offers of accommodation, and then repented. Not that he was afraid of their being able to prove the existence of his grandfather's will, as they had succeeded in proving his Uncle Corrado's marriage; but because all the talk about the trial annoyed him so excessively. At first he had not thought of this, and there he had been wrong. If now he could have given a third of all he possessed to put an end to all the chatter of the world (the very limited world of his equals), he would have given it with all his heart. But how could he venture to propose such a compact? Would not the opinion of these very people be that he did not feel himself firm in his saddle?

These clouds on the domestic horizon were the more trying to poor Renato, because he was only too well aware that the cause of all this woe had been himself. His honesty was costing him a good deal as far as his peace and quiet at present were concerned, and he thought with a shudder of what his designs for the future might entail. He was most anxious to behave as a gentleman should, and to ask Signor Ruggero for Margherita's hand; but how could he reveal his real name to them? He would fain have made a confession of his attachment to the Prince of Caivano, but that would have been telling him plainly, "I am your adversaries' ally." And then what would have happened? He dared not even think of it. He might have confided in the old princess, for she loved him so well and so heartily that she could understand and sympathize with him. But would the compassion of his old grandmother be enough to get him out of his difficulties? And so he went on, buffeted by fears and remorse, perpetually building new castles in the air, only to be blown down by the first puff of wind. In the meantime, the days were passing, and he continued to share them disconsolately between his own house and Margherita's, reproaching himself for having been the disturber of the peace of the family, afraid to take, and at the same time ashamed that he had not taken, that step which his love, his honesty, and his delicacy as a gentleman, told him perpetually was the right one.

And while he was showing so much irresolution as far as his actions were concerned, he by no means abstained from conversations which betrayed the state

of his heart to Margherita. This was happening constantly, and Margherita, who saw that he was melancholy without being able to guess the reason, could not certainly attribute his grave looks to any diminution of the love always so plainly to be seen in his eyes.

One day she thought she had found it all out. He always abstained from talking about the lawsuit, but sometimes, either in answer to a question of Signor Ruggero's or because he had a message for them from Signor Garantini, he could not avoid the subject, and then his words betrayed his embarrassment.

"You will win your suit," he said one day to Margherita, "and then you will forget your poor friend."

"Have you such a poor opinion of me?" replied she, in a tone of gentle reproof. "Even supposing my father did recover his rights, how could money make any difference in my feelings? And don't you think, Signor Errico, I might well be angry with you for suspecting me of such a thing?"

"Forgive me, forgive me! I can hardly understand what people say to me."

"Oh, of course, of course. You think that we are very anxious about this success of which our lawyer is so very hopeful. I have always longed for my father's happiness, and that he should be restored to his proper right and title, but I have never coveted either honour or money for myself. And, Signor Errico, I can't help thinking of the trouble this success of ours would bring on our relations. We, you see, are accustomed to this poverty, and if we lose our position is nothing the worse, it is lowly

enough already. But it would be such a come-down for them, and that vexes me."

"You have a kind heart!" cried Renato, in much agitation. "If your relations heard you, they might well be proud of you."

"Proud, no!" said Margherita, blushing; "but I believe they would like me, and I feel that I should like them. There are such good ladies in that family, and more than once I have heard people speak of them. There is one old lady, whom I have seen, so attractive looking, and with such a kind face. And then there is a younger lady, gentle and good and charitable; two handsome daughters, who deserve to be happy; and a son who is said to be nice."

"Oh, never mind him!" interrupted Renato.

"Why? Perhaps you are—jealous?"

"That's it!" he replied, much puzzled how to reply.

"I can tell you, Signor Errico, wherever there is jealousy there isn't much esteem."

"Really! that's a saying," he retorted, "that has no foundation in fact. When you have lived longer you will see that it isn't so exactly. You have some esteem for me, Signorina, haven't you?"

"I have, of course, after all you have done for my father—for us."

"Well, I accept your gratitude, and I am proud of your esteem. And then will you not feel any jealousy where I am concerned?"

"Signor Errico," said she, after a moment's reflection, "I am not sure. I think I should not; I am afraid I should. Contradictory terms. In short, you

are right; I have not lived long enough yet to understand these matters."

Shortly after this conversation, Renato had to spend a fortnight without seeing Margherita, "the light of his eyes," as, like Petrarch, he might well call her. They were weeks of utter darkness in a sky already gloomy enough for the poor lover. Signor Ruggero had been obliged to go to Melito, at the very extremities of Calabria, to speak to the son of the notary, the only member of that family remaining who could give any information about the lock of the desk which had been found broken after that often-mentioned visit of Vito Schisano's.

But this journey was in vain. The old man had disappeared from the neighbourhood a few days before. This looked rather suspicious, as he was a man of over seventy, who had scarcely left Melito more than two or three times in his life, and then only on very short journeys. But, whether it was natural or not, the man had certainly disappeared, and apparently he did not mean to return as before starting he had disposed of all his furniture, and announced that he was going to live in Naples.

To look for him in Naples! That certainly was possible, but Garantini, as soon as he heard of it, was of opinion that it would be in vain. He guessed where the blow came from, and regretted that he had not thought of it before. But, as the proverb says: "It is easy to be wise after the event." Renato, for his part, not daring to suspect his father, trembled when he thought of all the network of villainy in which they were being involved.

Confused and stunned by this blow, he did not know what resolution to take; he lived, as the saying is, from day to day, always putting off serious thoughts till the morrow. This sounds faint-hearted, unless we consider the peculiarity of his position and have compassion. Unfortunately even strong minds sometimes give way to alarm, and it often happens that a man, who would meet the greatest danger without flinching, comes to grief amid the trifling difficulties of everyday life.

And Renato could not foresee yet that destiny had something worse in store for him. If he had foreseen it, he would not have gone forth on a certain morning at eight o'clock, or he would have parried the blow and have met cunning with cunning.

He had just come out of the house in Donna Romita lane, when he became aware of an apparition the sight of which made his blood run cold. Medusa's head could not have been worse in fabulous times in Libya or in the inhospitable island of Seriphus. The head of Medusa in this case was Signor Turiello Schisano, coming along at a good pace, like a man minding his own business, without troubling himself to give annoyance to other people.

As soon as he perceived Renato, he stopped short, pretending the greatest astonishment.

"Oh, Signor Duca! Eccellenza in these parts?"

"Yes," Renato stammered; "I came—to look for a friend. You know this is a favourite quarter for students. And you—where are you going?"

"I—I was just going down by the steps at San Salvatore, to the Piazza del Carmine. But I

am not in a hurry; so if Eccellenza will allow me——"

"What is it? Let me hear."

"You are so good, Signor Duca."

"Never mind my title, please, Signor Turiello!" said Renato, who disliked greetings in the market-place, and especially in such a place as Donna Romita.

"As you will, Eccellenza," replied Signor Turiello, with a bow. "I had intended going to see you this very day, to ask a favour."

"Two of them, if it is in my power. What is it?"

"Oh. merely a trifle. My daughters——."

"By the way, I have not even asked for them. Excuse me, I was thinking about something else."

"Oh, Eccellenza is too good. At hom eevery day I say that you are chivalry itself——"

"In your home you all think too highly of me. But what can I do to oblige your daughters?"

"I will tell you. Eccellenza knows that this is the second evening of 'Othello' at the Fiorentini. Every one is talking about it—a new play, I hear."

"Yes, Signor Turiello," and Renato could not help smiling, "it was new two centuries and a half ago."

"How stupid of me!" replied Signor Turiello, disconcerted.

"No, no, Signor Turiello; it doesn't matter. These plays are always new, because they never grow old, and they can seem very new indeed, according to the actors who happen to be engaged. Maieroni, who will appear this evening, is an excellent Othello, and

especially in the last act, where he kills Desdemona, nothing could be better."

"Then it will be a good evening," replied Signor Turiello, looking innocent, "my girls would be obliged——"

"I understand; they would like the box for this evening."

"If Eccellenza would be so kind——"

"Certainly, certainly, with the greatest pleasure," replied Renato, most happy at being able so simply to make amends for all his want of civility for some time towards Signor Turiello and his family. "You make me feel, Signor Turiello, that our box is much too often unoccupied. My mother never goes to the theatre, my good grandmother very seldom; for myself I had almost forgotten it."

"Ah, yes indeed, Eccellenza has kept so much in retirement people have some reason to complain."

"How? What have people to complain of?" Renato asked, a little disconcerted; for these words touched him on a tender point.

"Don't you see!" he exclaimed; "a gentleman like you, absent from all festivities and pastimes, always buried in your books! Besides, Donna Anna is right; Eccellenza is so like his grandfather, the illustrious Don Ruggero, in everything, and he used to spend thirteen hours a day in his library. But then people are young only once, and health is not to be trifled with. A little variety is necessary, and you used to be very fond of the theatre, formerly."

"Yes, you are right, Signor Turiello, I ought to be like other young men, so I shall take your advice."

"Ah, I am so glad! And if my daughters might hope to see you this evening. To tell you the truth, the poor things thought they must have offended you in some way."

"Offended me? Assure them of the contrary, Signor Turiello. I have sometimes misanthropical fits, and a solitary life suits me best then. Please apolo-gise to them for me; and this evening I shall go to pay my respects to them."

"Ah, thanks, Signor Duca!" cried Signor Turiello, making a low bow. "I shall make haste to tell them the good news."

It was kindness of heart had made Renato speak in this way, and treat this villain so courteously, and promise to call on the young ladies, who, after all, were not to blame for the relationship. But there was another reason too. Signor Turiello was wide awake; he must not give him reason to suspect anything. And then if by entering the lists in a dexterous way, he could defeat him and baulk him of his ends, it would be no small gain. There is a proverb to the effect that whoever baulks a villain, gets thereby a sackful of indulgences. But some diplomacy was needful.

Poor diplomatist! he was to be the victim himself. Napoleon used to say in joke, that the ball to kill him was not yet made. And here we may remark, that the man who could take in Signor Turiello was not yet born.

So leaving the Duke of Melito to go his own ways, we may go before him to the Fiorentini. It is nothing of a theatre as far as accommodation goes. We might

call it a bonbon-box, if it were a little prettier; but notwithstanding the love Neapolitans have for this nutshell, a snuff-box is their most complimentary name for it. It is troublesome to get into, and once you are there, you can hardly get out again. But for all its shortcomings, and they are many, this little theatre, the smallest in Italy, is frequented by the *élite* of Neapolitan society. Not many years ago, in the marriage settlements of the Neapolitan duchesses and princesses, it was customary to stipulate for a box at the Fiorentini as well as at San Carlo.

And now let us return to our tale. That evening it was "Othello" at the Fiorentini, and Maieroni was attracting great crowds. The orchestra and the reserved seats were filled with spectators; the boxes were overflowing with lovely and well-dressed ladies.

Signor Turiello's daughters deserved to be included in the number. I have already said that they were handsome girls, and to their honour, I may add that they attracted the eyes of the students (the most inflammable part of humanity) who, attracted by the name of Shakespeare, were that evening in the theatre. Their father, who could not expect to make a sensation like his daughters, remained prudently in the background, and from time to time gave a sharp look at a box just opposite, the only one still empty five minutes before the curtain was drawn up.

Signor Turiello's uneasy expectation was not to last long. In a few moments the sound of a key being turned and the creaking of an opening door might be heard; the box opposite was opened, and the rustling of silk announced the arrival of some one else

to look at. Not one alone, but two; and the aforesaid spectators could not easily make up their minds as to which was the more beautiful. Both the young ladies were so lovely—the one fair, and dressed in white and pink; the other dark, and dressed in black, with a little white and blue round her neck, and in the bow of ribbon in the front of her dress.

Both were beautiful girls; but if at the first look the fair-haired one, with her blue eyes, her clear complexion and her pretty dress of muslin gauze and ribbon, seemed most attractive, the other, on closer inspection, bore off the palm, with her lovely features and statuesque appearance.

They were accompanied by two gentlemen; as dissimilar in appearance as the two young ladies already described. One of them, the youngest, as soon as he had seated himself beside the brunette (from which you may rightly conclude that he was the father of the fair-haired lady), glanced round him, as far as the front of the box permitted; and his looks expressed the satisfaction of a man who has nothing left to wish for, as soon as his eyes rested on the countenance, by no means sympathetic, of Signor Salvatore Schisano. I need say no more, because the four new-comers are old acquaintances of ours—Margherita and Nunziata, Signor Ruggero Altavilla and Signor Martino Palmanova.

Had the worthy Signor Martino got over his rage then? Not at all. But Signor Salvatore had persuaded him of the truth of the proverb, "Revenge is a delicacy that should be eaten cold." And Signor Martino had allowed his to cool; he had gone to pay

a visit to his neighbours, and had reverted to the subject of the marriage, but only to tell Signor Ruggero that he bore no grudge on account of the refusal, and that they would be greater friends than ever.

This friendly step gave the old man inexpressible pleasure, and took away all feeling of stiffness. Even his daughter, the danger being past, received their visitor most amiably. And Nunziata, for her part, took care to show that she was reconciled to the state of things.

"Naughty girl," she had said, "you won't marry papa!"

"Nunziata, dear, you must forgive me. A poor girl like me must be sensible of the honour your father has shown me. But just because we are poor there can be no marriage for me, at least in the rank in which you wished to see me. Moreover, you know Corrado is far away; my father is left alone, and he would find it hard to change his habits now——"

"Of course, of course, you don't want to marry; that is your reason, the best of all reasons. And you are not far wrong either, girls have a better time of it when there is only one in the house like you and me. Believe me, Margherita, even papa understands, and he likes you better than ever. Indeed, he did this very thing to please me. I was afraid that he might get tired of remaining single; I was afraid he might marry some one else, who would be a stepmother to me in deed as well as name. But now, he has sworn that he isn't thinking of matrimony at all, and that, at any rate, no other lady shall enter the house while

I am in it; and so my mind is easy. Now kiss me, you naughty mamma, and let us have done with the subject."

The dear ingenuous girl! And she never blushed even while bringing out one lie after another, because in reality she was acting a part, and was hiding the disgust which she and her father felt at such an affront from those beggars of Altavillas.

But what was all this hypocrisy for? I will tell you. A few days after Signor Palmanova's proposal it was Nunziata's birthday, and her father gave a grand dinner, at which his neighbours were of course expected to appear. But for the birthday, one might suppose the feast had been given in their honour, for they were the only guests of any mark present, if we do not include under this head, two young gentlemen, one of them Signor Palmanova's head clerk, and the other a promising young Adonis, gentleman-like, pale, and very timid, who looked at the young ladies when they were looking away, and blushed extremely when any of the others addressed him.

At the sight of this youth, apparently of good family, Margherita had trembled for her brother.

"Is he married?" she asked Nunziata, before they sat down to dinner.

"Oh, he doesn't dream of such a thing!" was the reply. "He is the son of a correspondent of my father's, Signor Pietra of Genoa. A fortune of two millions," the dear girl could not help adding, "enough for a prince."

These words of Nunziata's, so lightly spoken, were not very reassuring to Margherita, who was by no

means pleased to come to this dinner, and had only accepted the invitation from fear of showing discourtesy or rudeness, unbecoming in rich and poor. Moreover, she was sorry not to have seen Errico that morning, to tell him why they would not be at home. But love is ingenious, and Margherita had found a moment to run down to Signora Concetta, and tell her of this invitation to dinner at Signor Palmanova's.

Signor Palmanova had said, "You are my guests for the day—till eleven o'clock, are you not?"

Signor Ruggero bowed, without having the least idea of what his worthy host had in his head.

"Then," said Signor Martino, "this evening we go to the theatre. It is 'Othello' at the Fiorentini, and Nunziata is dying to see this comedy."

"A tragedy, papa!"

"Tragedy or comedy, it's all one to me. I, for one, know little about the theatre. I can tell a brigantine from a despatch-boat; but a tragedy from a comedy! As long as there is some one in the house who understands these things, that's enough. It's for our mutual benefit; business is my line, study my daughter's. Eh, Signor Ruggero?"

"Quite right."

"To the theatre then, and we shall see this tragedy."

"But," said Margherita, timidly, "I don't know whether this dress——"

"Oh, you will do very well, just as you are," interrupted Nunziata. "If anything you look too beautiful. And then, you see, I am not putting on any finery either, not as much as a pin."

Margherita felt a vague presentiment of misfortune. But, not being superstitious, she thought it must be because she was going to the theatre without telling Errico, and he would have been so happy to know that he might meet her, and follow her wherever she went. Margherita belonged to that limited class of noble beings, who neither have nor wish to have any secret from the man they love, and who bestow on him the perfect confidence which they require from him in return.

Certainly the circumstances were such that she could not have foreseen them, and Signor Errico could not complain; but still, her wish was to go home. She gave her father an expressive glance, showing plainly enough how much she wished not to go. But Signor Ruggero was as embarrassed as she was, or perhaps more so. And the upshot of all their perplexity was, that, not wishing to go, they allowed themselves to be taken to the theatre.

Their box was on the second tier to the right. It was small like all the others, and six could certainly not be accommodated in it. But Signor Palmanova had foreseen this, and had sent his clerk and the son of his correspondent in Genoa, to the orchestra seats.

"A stranger like you," Signor Martino had said, "should have some idea of what the theatre is like, and from this box, leaving the front seat to the ladies, you could see nothing. Don't you think so, Signor Pietra?"

The young gentleman had blushed and bowed, and taken himself off to the orchestra seats. Nunziata found an opportunity of saying a last word to him.

"Signor Emilio," she whispered, "see if Neapolitan ladies are as pretty as the Genoese."

"I have not seen enough of them yet to judge, Signorina," replied Signor Emilio, with a pleasant smile.

This little episode had made no impression on Margherita. She felt confused and very much upset; confused, because as she went so seldom to the theatre she was not accustomed to feel herself the mark for so many opera-glasses, and because, the curtain being up when they came in, she was impatient to be seated, and to stop the rustling of her silk dress; and upset because she was thinking of Errico, for whom she felt even more, sitting there among so many people, while he was in his little room at home expecting her return, and probably counting the minutes.

"He would never think of looking for me in the theatre," she said to herself; "and of his own choice he certainly will not be here. He can't care much about the theatre, for he never talks about it. Poor Signor Errico! He is poor too, and likes his books better."

And very soon the play was absorbing her whole attention. It was new to her, and therefore the more interesting, though she did not sympathize much with Desdemona falling in love so madly with a Moor, and knowing nothing of the curious fact that the name of Cristoforo Moro, a Venetian noble, after figuring in a story of Cinzio Giraldi's, had later furnished the subject of one of Shakespeare's masterpieces.

In the meantime the worthy Signor Martino was

not less attentive than his beautiful neighbour, that ungrateful girl, who could not appreciate the worth of a husband like him. But he was paying little attention to the acting, and had not even glanced at Desdemona's fair hair. He was looking instead at a box opposite his own, where there were two girls, with a man dressed in black who remained seated, and almost bent down in the back of the box. And the eyes of the two men met with a look of intelligence, not intended to be seen by the others. People talk of acting! There is acting everywhere, and the most interesting not always behind the footlights.

Finally, at the close of the third act, the box opposite Signor Palmanova opened, and a good-looking young man, of aristocratic appearance and quietly dressed, made his appearance. The man in black, or if you like it better, Signor Turiello Schisano, got up, made a low bow and departed, leaving the new-comer alone with the two girls. No doubt Signor Turiello left his visitor there because it was impossible for him to get away during the act. The mouse was in the trap, and there was no need even to close the door. Poor Duke of Melito! He excused himself to the Signorine Schisani for having been so long without going to see them, heard from them all about the first three acts, which he had not seen, and was very far from suspecting the trap which his father's secretary had laid for him.

As soon as he had perceived that all was ready, Signor Martino, like a good gunner, set fire to the train.

"Nunziata," he said, "what do you think of this theatre? So many beautiful ladies?"

"Ah yes," Nunziata replied, who was by no means in the dark about the great secret, and was longing to know all; "I should like to know their names. That one there, for instance."

"Where?"

"In the first row near the stage, in a dress of crimson satin and Brussels lace."

"Ah, you have hit on an acquaintance of mine. That's the Princess of Belmonte."

"And that other there, in the second tier, number —wait till I count the boxes—one, two, three, four, five—oh, the fifth. Who are those two handsome women?"

"Women? Girls, I should say; for they seem to me quite young girls. And they are not so very beautiful."

"Margherita, that's a compliment to us."

"Why?" asked Signor Martino, with the most innocent look possible.

"Because you don't think those girls over there pretty. We don't require any flattery of that kind, I can tell you, sir. And, Margherita, do you take a look, and see if they are not really handsome."

"Where are they?" Margherita asked, who, though not much caring to look about her, wished to please her friend.

"There, opposite us, in the second row, number five."

"Take my opera-glass, Signorina," said Signor Martino, as polite now as he had been innocent a little before.

The girl took the opera-glass and looked in the direction she was told.

"What do you think? Am I not right?"

Margherita had put down the glass at once, and looked quite confused.

"Yes, they are handsome enough," she stammered, blushing.

The poor girl had seen a young gentleman with the two girls so like Errico di Sarno that it could be no one else.

"Ah, you agree with me? I am glad," exclaimed the innocent creature. "But who can they be?"

"I don't know them, I told you," replied Signor Martino; "but wait, I think I know the gentleman who is with them. Signorina, the opera-glass, please."

At that instant Margherita would like to have been some fathoms underground.

"My God!" she thought, as she handed the opera-glass to Signor Palmanova. "If he says Errico di Sarno my father will look too, and without seeing any harm in it he will say that he is a friend of ours. And Errico, if he sees us too! I told him nothing about coming here, and perhaps he won't be pleased. But he too—how does he come to be here? so well dressed too?"

The poor girl was on thorns, and her heart began to throb violently.

"Well, papa, who is it?" Nunziata was inquiring in the meantime.

"Oh, I know him very well; it is Don Renato, Duke of Melito, the son of the Prince of Caivano. By the way, he must be a relation of yours, dear Signor Ruggero."

At this unexpected address, Signor Ruggero looked

by no means pleased; but he was far from suspecting the surprise in store for him. If he had happened to look at his daughter at that moment, he would have felt surprised still more.

"Where?" he asked, making an effort to recover his self-possession. "Let me see this young cousin of mine."

"There, in that box, number five."

Ruggero Altavilla took the glass offered him by Signor Martino, and looked where he was told.

"Are you—quite certain?" he said. "To me that looks like a Signor Errico di Sarno."

"Di Sarno? Not at all. Where did you hear that name? That is the young Duke of Melito. I know him, I tell you, as well as I do you. But look, there is the cheese for my maccaroni; do you see that man just coming into the box? Now I know who the girls are also, for that is Signor Salvatore Schisano, steward, secretary, agent, and goodness knows what else, of the prince, your cousin. And I remember now that he has two daughters, and that I have seen them with him several times. Now, are you convinced?"

Signor Ruggero was just going to answer, when he perceived that Margherita was leaning back, almost fainting in her chair.

"My dear, what is the matter?" he cried, in dismay.

"Nothing, father dear, nothing; only giddiness—the heat—I feel suffocating——"

And leaning on her father, who had hastily interposed between her and Signor Palmanova, the poor girl drew back quickly. A feeling of dignity had given

her strength enough for that, but as soon as she was away from the bright light she collapsed entirely.

Signor Ruggero was a gentleman and a father; however, he preserved his composure under these trying circumstances most admirably.

"My daughter is not accustomed to be in crowded places," he said, "and the heat has upset her. Please open that door, Signor Palmanova. Come, Margherita dear, lean on my arm," he added, while Signor Martino obeyed with as much alacrity as a servant in danger of losing his place. "A little fresh air will bring you round."

"Yes, father, a little air," murmured the girl, moving herself with some difficulty with the help of her father's arm.

"Allow me," he said, pressing forwards, and making Signor Martino go to one side.

"Oh, I am extremely sorry," he stammered; "really, if I had known—but we shall go with them —shall we, Nunziata?"

"No, stay, stay, I tell you. You need not trouble yourself any more, Signor Palmanova!"

Ruggero Altavilla emphasized every word, every syllable even, as if he wished to drive them home. Signor Martino could see how much he was feeling it, and stood looking at him in a stupid sort of way. Even Nunziata, who at first was going to rise, remained where she was, turning half round, covered with confusion, and unable to say a word.

Margherita felt more dead than alive as she left the box. The fresh air of the corridors restored her a little. Signor Ruggero had seized his cloak as he

was going, and with his daughter on his arm led her away, without troubling himself even to bow to Signor Palmanova.

The latter gentleman stood a little while looking after him, like a rifleman looking at his shot in the target. He was rather put out by this hasty retreat, and felt some remorse at having gone so far. But the worthy Signor Martino was not a man to trouble himself much about it, and always looked at things from a business point of view. Accordingly he soon silenced his conscience with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Well done, after all!" he exclaimed. "The blow has gone well home. Signor Turiello himself might be satisfied."

And he gave a glance at the box opposite, to receive a look of congratulation from his worthy ally.

But Signor Turiello was not minding him, and indeed in Schisano's box there seemed to be as much confusion as in his own. The young gentleman had disappeared! Signor Turiello, completely stunned, looked from his daughters to the door which had just closed; and the girls, much more astonished than he was, who, at least, knew something of all this business, were staring sometimes at their father, sometimes at the door.

Signor Turiello had certainly been in too great a hurry to return from his expedition to the pit. But how could he resist? He had seen Signorina Nunziata's eyes on number five; Signor Martino's opera-glass pointing in the same direction; Signorina Margherita looking also at number five, and he could not bear to miss seeing the effects of her recognition,

much more interesting to him than all the recognitions of old comedies. And when he returned to the box, from pure haste, he made another mistake. However, as it has been written already, it is not every chambermaid who knows how to make use of a keyhole.

"Oh, oh, who do I see!" he had exclaimed, pretending to look by accident. "There is Signor Palmanova and his pretty daughter. And that other pretty girl they have with them, who can she be? Perhaps the one Signor Martino wanted to marry? Then it must be all settled?"

So he went on, answering his own questions. Renato, out of politeness, had turned to look in the same direction. And, not trusting his eyes, he had taken up the opera-glass just as Margherita, overcome by the shock she had received, had half risen to get away from the front of the box. Medusa's head, if he had seen it, could not have had such an effect upon him.

"Margherita! Was it she, she herself? But how? Why? Without his having heard of it? And what had this man been babbling about, about her and Martino, and a marriage being settled. And just then she must have seen him; perhaps recognized him too. That Signor Palmanova knew his steward; yes, there could be no doubt about it, that man had told his name. Unless he had, why this commotion?"

In the course of a few seconds Renato had seen Margherita, felt some new and strange suspicions, and foreseen some catastrophe. And having seen the door of the box open, Signor Altavilla going out with his daughter on his arm, and the others looking so

disconcerted, as if some catastrophe had happened, he jumped to his feet without loss of time.

"Signorine," he said, excitedly, "I beg your pardon; I must leave you, though I have been here only so short a time. I remember a pressing engagement. Good evening."

And there he left them, only anxious to open the door, and not to hear a word that might detain him a minute.

Happily the girls did not know what to say to him, and Signor Turiello, with all his cunning, was taken so much by surprise, that he could not speak.

In less time than it takes to describe it, Renato was at the side door of the theatre, at the end of the passage leading to the boxes. At that moment Signor Ruggero appeared in the passage with his daughter on his arm. Renato, looking very penitent, went to meet them.

"Signor Ruggero!" he said, in a tone of voice between fear and hope.

Margherita perceived him, and uttered a slight exclamation. Her father pressed her arm, as if to support her and give her courage, and gave Renato such a severe look that his blood ran cold.

"Signor Duca," said the old man, after a moment's silence, "we were the friends of Errico di Sarno. You can remember or forget this, just as you like."

And he went on, drawing Margherita, who could hardly walk, along with him.

Renato stood as if thunderstruck, as pale as death, while drops of cold perspiration broke out on his forehead. With wide-open eyes, he kept staring at

the door through which his beloved had disappeared, whom possibly he had seen for the last time, and he felt as if he could lie down and die.

He was accosted here by Antonio Carafa. Antonio could very well see that his friend was greatly upset, and feared that something had happened from the glimpse he had caught of the painful scene.

"Courage, my dear Renato! courage!" he said, taking him affectionately by the arm.

At his touch, Renato turned and looked steadily at his friend, whom at first he had not remarked. At last he gave himself a shake, like a person trying to get rid of a disagreeable impression; and, as he came to himself, it occurred to him that Antonio Carafa must have seen and heard everything.

"Thanks, Antonio," he replied; "let me go."

"No, I won't let you go! you would commit some folly."

"And if I should! Can we escape our destiny?"

"Certainly not, sometimes; but sometimes our destiny is our own doing, when we give up ourselves without a struggle to this blind, this stupid, but inexorable force. Come, Renato, be a man! And first of all, let us get out of this, for no one must see you with this woe-begone face."

Renato had lost heart completely, and allowed himself to be led away like a baby. Antonio, like a good friend, did not leave him to his own devices at the nearest corner, but made him get into the first carriage they met, and then, by Santa Lucia, where there was a refreshing breeze, they proceeded to Chiaia. In this way, the Duke of Melito arrived at his father's

palazzo, and found himself in his own rooms, without even knowing which streets they had passed through.

That night Antonio Carafa was missing at the Café dell' Europa, of which he was one of the main pillars ; and his friends assembled there expected him in vain. Antonio Carafa, the greatest wit of the party, was busy as a nurse, with a care and attention that no hired one would have shown.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARCUS TULLIUS AT WORK.

THAT day, Signor Garantini was doing what lawyers usually do when they make their escape from court; he was returning to his study, with an equally pleasant occupation in prospect, viz., that of answering his clients' letters. Like all other lawyers, either walking or, if you like it better, galloping from the courts to his study, he was thinking over his most troublesome cases, turning over their weak sides and most vulnerable points in his mind.

Accordingly, on this day, Signor Garantini was meditating on the case of Altavilla *v.* Altavilla, and feeling by no means pleased with the turn his client's affairs were taking in court. It was a difficult case, and the judges did not look like men inclined to give their due weight to every little circumstance, to all the proofs carefully collected by him, in confirmation of the entry in the Melito notary's book.

In the meantime, he had mounted the stairs to the third floor, in the Palazzo Barbaia. The servant who

opened the door for him, as he drew back the curtain, said—

"Signor Altavilla is waiting in your study."

"What! *lupus in fabula!*" exclaimed the lawyer. "And has he been waiting long? I bet, Pasquale, you forgot to tell him that I was at the tribunal of commerce."

"Oh, Eccellenza!" cried Pasquale, with offended dignity, "you cannot think so! I told him, but he said he would wait for you all the same, because he wanted to see you without delay. And he has been there this half-hour."

"Well, go and tell him I shall be with him directly."

Before many minutes were over, Garantini came into his study for his interview with Ruggero Altavilla.

"I hope you will excuse me for having kept you waiting so long. A lawyer in court has not more liberty than the prisoners themselves."

Altavilla bowed, without moving a muscle of his face at this sally.

"I have time enough," he replied. "Besides, I was so anxious to see you, and at this quiet time of day, because what I have to say may take some time."

"I shall be most happy," replied Garantini; "though, as far as the case is concerned——" he was about to add: "there's little to tell;" but the other left him no time.

"Oh, I didn't come to trouble you about the case. I have waited so long, I can wait still. It will run its course, and if it should go against me, it doesn't much matter; I am prepared for that misfortune also."

The tone in which he spoke struck the lawyer.

"Signor Ruggero," he said, in a tone of concern, "something has happened."

"Ah, you have remarked it then? So much the better. That will explain and justify my words if they should seem too bitter."

At this stage of the conversation Garantini rose, and said gravely—

"Signor Altavilla, my practice is never to get excited except in the interests of my clients at the bar of justice. I will hear what you may have to say to me, and, if anything in what you are going to say may seem bitter, I will remember what you are, one who has lived and suffered more than I in the cause of your family and your country. Pray proceed."

"Thanks!" replied Altavilla. "Your words are noble, Signor Garantini, and I cannot emulate them. Ah, if you had told me, when I had the honour of making your acquaintance: 'Take care, Ruggero Altavilla, the gentleman who introduced me, is not really called Errico di Sarno.'"

Signor Garantini reddened at these unexpected words.

"What do you mean?" he stammered in confusion.

"That his name is Renato, Duke of Melito, the son of the man who bears the title that should be mine."

Garantini looked down, without being able to say a word.

"Can you deny it?" continued Altavilla.

"It is true," replied the lawyer; "but why do you say this to me?"

"Signor Garantini," said Ruggero, making an

evident effort to retain his composure and to speak quietly, "there is no man, however strong he may be, and well able to look after his own dignity, who, some time or other during his life, doesn't feel the necessity of opening his mind to another person, either to ask his advice or to relieve his mind. Allow me in this instance to relieve my mind."

Signor Garantini had lost his reckoning.

"But how did you come to know it?" said he, without stopping to consider. "The duke, perhaps, told you——?"

"No, he told me nothing; and he could tell me nothing. The facts remain, and he never shall put his foot in my house again; a poor house but an honest one, where we never tried to rob anything from any one, neither money nor reputation."

"Aha!" said the lawyer to himself, "so much for presentiments. I was thinking of this very thing as I came in." And he continued aloud, "I have no wish to intrude into your secrets, Signor Ruggero, if you think it better not to tell me. But, after what you have said, there is a point which I should like to see cleared up. I am a friend of the duke's, and through him I got you as a client. If all relations with him must cease all relations between lawyer and client must cease too. Am I to understand that this is your wish, and shall I give back all the papers into your hands? It is quite just, and I cannot complain."

"No; I did not mean that," replied the old gentleman; "I have already told you, I think, that I don't care about the case. Whether I win or lose it is now all the same to me."

This brought back all Garantini's spirit, which for a moment had deserted him.

"Take care, Signor Altavilla; I can't bear that. Whether you care about the case or not is no matter; you can think about it as you like, and your sentiments perhaps do you credit. But to say so to me, your lawyer, by your own choice; to leave the papers with me, because you don't care whether you win or lose, and to think that I should be satisfied—this I cannot permit, and you must see that your papers cannot remain in my hands another minute."

So saying, Garantini opened his desk, and took out the famous packet so well known to the reader.

"You have lost the composure which you promised," remarked Altavilla, with the imperturbability that marked his distress; "and which of us two has been most tempted to lose it? I was living quietly, without asking help, or advice, or friendship from anybody, when Signor Errico di Sarno forced himself into my confidence, offered himself as friend and counsellor, and brought me to you. He wished to be of service to me; I understand that. Still, it was under a false name. For a young fellow to be depraved enough to act like this, I can understand without excusing it; but——"

"But not his lawyer, you mean?"

The old gentleman looked at him in silence.

"I can't help it," continued Garantini, as he bent his head; "but I don't deserve your bad opinion. What else could I do under the circumstances? We lawyers have not only people's interests to look after, but the people themselves. We don't always stop at

facts which may be either certain or doubtful, good apparently or otherwise; but we penetrate to the reason, the cause, the intention. Now don't shrug your shoulders so disdainfully, Signor Ruggero. You should weigh the reasons, and then judge like a sensible man."

Signor Ruggero made a gesture of assent, sufficient in Signor Garantini's eyes to excuse the bit of impatience which had rather annoyed him.

"Well then," Garantini continued, "Renato comes to me and says, 'My dear friend, there is a family, noble, honest, respectable, but fallen in the world, that accuses mine of usurping its rights. If these people are right, my father and I are keeping what is not ours, and it would be dishonesty in us to persist in keeping it when we know that it doesn't belong to us. I must know the truth; I put honour far before riches, and I can't live in this painful state of doubt. Look over these family papers which have come into my hands by accident; and, as I am not the head of the family, neither can I decide anything on the clearest proofs; and as the truth is never so clearly brought out and never appears so strong as when the evidence on both sides is given, do you take up the case of these poor people against us. You will do me a favour. We may become poor, but no one can hinder us from being and remaining gentlemen.' This, sir, was what the duke said. And now, was it not beautiful, noble, and really worthy of a noble mind?"

"The assumed name still remains," replied Ruggero Altavilla. "This deception spoils all the nobleness and greatness of his conduct."

"Come now, Signor, be reasonable. Ought he the first thing to have come to you and said: 'Do you know that I am the son of your adversary?' After that declaration how could he have done anything? That his intentions were honest the results prove. Does not his treatment of the case show that his object was a worthy one. The duke concealed his name, it is true; but remember that he did so not for your sake alone, but for his parents'; he couldn't say to them: 'For the sake of justice, I will go against you.' There is an instance of a father sacrificing his sons to the cause of justice; but even Roman history gives us no instances of a son daring to judge his father."

The old gentleman replied to this discourse with a shake of his head.

"The greatness of mind is doubtful," he said, "when a son conceals the truth from his father. You must allow me to think that some other way could have been found of removing his doubts, and furthering the ends of justice."

"Signor Ruggero, your judgment is too severe, and you forget the part which chance or destiny has had in the matter. After the duke had made your acquaintance, without his being able to foresee that you were a relation of his own, consider that this was the only way of clearing up the matter and getting some satisfaction for you—a thing you may expect confidently from the law, if your claims are well founded. You have now been able to prove your legitimate descent from Don Federigo Altavilla; you are a prince, you have a right to your name before

the world; and this is the work of a gentleman of whom you are suspicious, a gentleman who, I may say, has carried his delicacy so far as to conceal——"

"What now? More mysteries still?"

"Certainly, Signor, there are more. The Duke of Melito has paid two-thirds or perhaps more of the costs in this case."

This time Garantini thought that at last he had overcome the old man's obstinacy. Driven to extremities he had brought forth his last argument, and it seemed to him unanswerable. But this declaration had an effect entirely contrary to his expectations. He had miscalculated the effect of his oratory.

"And you admire this?" cried the old man, jumping up from his chair; "but in my eyes it makes the matter worse. The Duke of Melito wants to insult my white hairs then? Signor, I am poor," he added, checking an impetuousness almost juvenile; "but in my honourable poverty, and without having proved my legitimate descent in court, I have always considered myself an Altavilla, Heart of Gold! and I have always comported myself in a manner not unbecoming the device on my ancestor's coat-of-arms. I hope all Altavillas can say the same, and declare that no dishonour rests on their house, as, please God, it will never rest on mine. I hope the Duke of Melito will be satisfied with having attempted it; and that I, for the sake of my family and its honour, on which no suspicion must rest, abstain from any reprisals."

This speech was very trying to Signor Garantini.

"Signor Ruggero," he said, timidly; "can you tell me exactly what has happened?"

"Oh, there is nothing which we need care to conceal. We thought him poor and respectable. He lodged in the same house with us, and while he and my daughter were both looking after our old landlady, they became acquainted. He was most polite and attentive to us. If we had known nothing more of him I should have considered him a most suitable husband for Margherita; his own wish also, apparently——"

"But this——" interrupted Garantini, who seemed to think he had found a triumphant argument.

"Yes, I admit that before making our acquaintance his designs may not have been good. He may have become conscious of this and have repented when he found that in my house dwelt an angel. And what does this amount to? Is his deceit the less hateful? his impudence less abominable, or his plans less insulting?"

Garantini hardly knew what to answer in behalf of his young friend.

"Signor Ruggero, I can understand and sympathize with your resentment. But one thing I know and bear in mind. Perhaps you will hardly believe it; Don Renato is a gentleman. Certainly appearances are against him, and I cannot defend him properly, because I don't know his plan nor how he set to work, but I trust to time. You can't prevent me hoping, not only on account of our friendship, but in the cause of truth. As for myself in particular, allow me to apologize. All that I have said, and all that I have done for you as a lawyer, will prove, I

think, that my honesty is unquestionable. Moreover —and please don't imagine that I am consulting my own ease in saying this—your papers are here, and you are at liberty to put them in the hands of any one else in whom you have more confidence."

"No," said Signor Ruggero; "you don't perhaps sufficiently estimate the importance of the fact that a friend of yours should have assumed a false name; but, after all, I can't make you responsible for an error committed by myself and under conditions less excusable than yours. Therefore, pray let there be no difference in our mutual relations; and consider all that I have said as an outburst, and feel assured that after all you have done, there is no lawyer whom I could trust so well as you."

"But observe," replied Garantini, "the lawsuit is not going to my mind, and I am beginning to have fears. I wouldn't for all the world——"

"No, no; let it be; if we lose I won't complain, we can't help it. I will work; I will sell the little that still belongs to me to pay the expenses incurred by you. Oh, don't say no! Nothing else would satisfy my feelings of honour. And then, if I fail in obtaining justice from men, I must trust in God. I have one request to make. When you see the Duke of Melito make him understand that he must never enter my house again."

Garantini replied with a bow, greatly touched by the sight of so much grief borne with so much dignity. As to defending Renato, he had done all in his power, abstaining even from noticing some remarks that had justly wounded his feelings. But he was tender-

hearted, and could not bring himself to add to the poor old gentleman's sorrows.

Ruggero Altavilla had taken his departure, and the worthy lawyer's mind was still rather disturbed by this conversation with his old client, when Pascariello appeared to announce a visit from Antonio Carafa, of Venola.

"What the deuce can he want?" said Garantini to himself. Just then he recollected that Antonio Carafa was the Duke of Melito's bosom friend, and conjectured mentally that his visit had something to do with the one he had just received.

"Show him in," he replied, getting up to receive his new visitor.

Antonio Carafa had the look of a man who has not slept, and who feels that he is a bringer of evil tidings.

"What's the matter?" the lawyer demanded, at the sight of his gloomy countenance.

"Bad enough, my dear Garantini. Our friend Don Renato has been in bed since yesterday with a violent fever. The doctor called last night, and fears it may turn to inflammation of the brain, meningitis, or goodness knows what! His father is perplexed and annoyed; his mother is at her prayers; the old princess is the only one who has kept her head, and she never leaves the bedside of her beloved grandson."

"Good gracious! what has happened?"

"Oh, I know, or I think I can guess from a certain scene which I witnessed, by chance, yesterday evening at the Fiorentini."

And Antonio Carafa described the little he had

seen in confirmation of some other observations he had made, which led him to think that his friend Renato was in love. Garantini, who knew about it too, supplied what was wanting in Antonio's tale from Signor Altavilla's, and came to the conclusion that his recognition of the Duke of Melito under the assumed name of Errico di Sarno had been the cause of the catastrophe.

"And now?" he demanded, resuming the thread of the discourse. "Now they don't know what to do. The prince is shut up in his study with his steward, discussing business matters. He is a selfish man, you know, the father. Renato's mother, as I told you, is praying, and gives no help at all. The old princess is in despair; she wants a consultation of doctors, as she fears it may be a tedious illness; and then she is so fond of poor Renato. It was she who sent me to you to see if you could suggest anything."

"Suggest what?"

"Ah, that's true, I haven't told you yet. In his delirium since yesterday, Renato talks of nothing except Margherita. She, I suppose, is the young lady of yesterday. To my certain knowledge, I can add that she is the girl he saw for the first time eight months ago or thereabouts. Do you remember the day we gave the dinner at the Frisio rock to that Florentine man?"

"Yes, I remember; a girl we saw in the harbour as we were passing their boat. Go on, though. Can I do anything?"

"In this way. Renato keeps talking of this girl and of you too, as the person who can settle every-

thing. 'Call Garantini,' he said this morning. 'Before I die I must see him.' And he mixes up your name with Margherita's as if you had some influence with her. The fever has evidently confused his head. But Donna Anna thinks there may be some truth in it, and that we should try to get to the bottom of it. That is why I am here. I dragged myself away from Renato's bedside just to please the old lady. So tell me, do you know this girl or any of her family?"

"Very little," replied Garantini, rather embarrassed. "My friend certainly confided in me—he told me his secret; but as to influence with this family, that, my dear Antonio, is not the case."

"But, at any rate, you know who they are. The princess is a sensible woman. Renato is the light of her eyes, and she, if these turn out to be respectable people, would please her grandson, even if she had to fight her son."

"Excellent woman!"

"Then, Garantini, you can——"

"Indeed, I can't do much, as I have already told you; and now, I am afraid, I can do nothing, since the girl's father has discovered that the young gentleman, who called himself a lawyer, with good prospects but nothing else, was really the son of a prince."

"Poor Renato! I can imagine the whole thing," said Antonio Carafa. "Do you remember, Garantini, when we landed at the Immacolatella? He left us there, with some excuse, at the corner of the Via Piliero, to turn back and follow the girl who had made such an impression on him. How these sudden and violent attacks of love come, I don't know, because

I have never felt them; but that there are such cases we must admit. It was Renato's wish to fall in love in this way, even though it should be his death; he has got his wish only too literally, and we have come to this pass. After that day I saw very little of him, and always in a hurry. I met him once in the Via Nilo, when I was returning from the station, and he gave me to understand that he was happy, and promised to tell me everything some other day. That's all I know. Certainly, if he wished to know who that girl was, to get near her, and to live as they do, he must have concealed his name and rank. I remember he was very plainly dressed, he, who always thought so much about his attire. But one thing is certain—at least, I can't think otherwise—that Renato has done nothing dishonourable, and that towards the girl and her family he has behaved like a gentleman."

"As far as I can see," replied Garantini, "he has; or rather, I may say, that I am sure of it; for I know very well what sort of people he had to deal with."

"And this brings me to Donna Anna's commission," said Antonio. "What sort of people are they? If you know them, if they are friends of yours, you can speak freely to me."

"Oh, with you, certainly; you are a good fellow, and an honourable one, which after all comes to the same thing."

"Thanks! and the old princess is a lady of the old stamp. She was not born among the great ones of the earth, but she is more noble than many of them; and in Casa Caivano she has an influence due, very justly, to her excellence and good sense. If she wishes

Renato to be happy (and she must wish it), she will succeed, whether the prince likes it or not."

Garantini shook his head, like a man not quite convinced by this argument.

"You doubt it? and why? Her great fondness for Renato—his illness, a case where doctors can do nothing——"

"Yes, all right," Garantini interrupted; "but if you knew who the girl is!"

"And that's what I am asking you in the name of the princess."

"Excuse me, Antonio; she is the very one who must not hear. It is Renato's secret."

"I know very well that it is a secret, and Donna Anna knows it too. But Renato himself, when delirious, said, 'Call Garantini,' it seems to me——"

"Don Renato may have allowed a hint to escape him, but a word said when a person is delirious cannot authorize me to tell a secret like this to any of his own family!"

"What a pity!" exclaimed Carafa, feeling the truthfulness of the observation.

"Don't you see?" proceeded Garantini. "To you, to you alone, I would tell it, under the seal of secrecy, because you are not of the family, and with you there are not the same reasons for secrecy as with the Princess of Caivano."

"Thank you," said Antonio, who was honour itself; "but if it is a secret——"

"Yes; but I can tell it to you, just to show you that it is impossible to tell his own people. And,

besides, did not Don Renato promise to tell you everything some day?"

"Yes, that is true."

"Well, here's the secret for you. First of all, you remember that the Prince of Caivano is at law with some of his relations."

"I remember; and I know that you are the lawyer on the opposite side. Indeed, to be candid with you——"

"You may say what you like."

"Though I know," proceeded Antonio, "what the obligations of an honest lawyer in the cause of justice are, on which ever side he may be, I can't deny that it surprised me very much to see a friend of Renato's, like you, going against his father."

"How often people are wrong in their judgments!" remarked Garantini, with a quiet smile. "If I were to tell you that I accepted the case because—— But we may leave that for the present; and do you trust me without saying any more? I will only tell you what concerns the matter in hand. The father of Margherita, the girl our poor friend is in love with, is Ruggero, the son of Corrado, King Joachim's general, and elder son of old Don Federigo; while the present Prince of Caivano, also Don Federigo, is the son of another Ruggero, Corrado's younger brother, and the second son of the old prince; and it is about his will, which disappeared, that the present lawsuit has been brought."

Antonio Carafa was petrified with astonishment.

"You see, therefore," proceeded Garantini, "how impossible it would be to go to the old princess and

to tell her 'Renato is in close alliance with the enemies of your house.' Then there is another consideration, still more important for her. In court, it appeared that a certain Vito Schisano, an old servant of the prince's, was suspected of having stolen Don Federigo's will. His reasons may very well have been to secure the property to the second son, to make him an accomplice—and his son-in-law. What is certain is that, the day the old prince died, Vito Schisano went to the notary's house, and into his study, with some pretence of taking away papers he had left there a few days before. After he was gone the desk was found to have been broken open. In two months, Ruggero, the prince's second son, marries Annella Schisano, the daughter of the servant, steward, agent, secretary, or whatever he was called."

"Annella!" exclaimed Antonio. "Then Donna Anna is really a Schisano."

"Annella and Donna Anna are one and the same. Now you understand why we can't tell her. And I have your word, have I not?"

Carafa gave him his hand. "Garantini," he said, "your secret is safe with me. I will forget all you have told me. But what a strange thing destiny is! Renato invokes a fatal passion, and that very day he falls in love with a girl, his adversary's daughter. And then, how does he come to be mixed up with the lawsuit! Or rather, how does it come that, being so intimate with them, he didn't perceive the necessity of either retiring out of sight or telling his real name?"

"I told you already, Antonio——"

"Ah, I beg your pardon; this is something which I am not to know."

"Not at all, you can know it very well; but it is such a complicated business that I feel as if I should not tell you without our friend's permission. In this, too, he has behaved like an honourable man, and a most scrupulous one."

"I can imagine it," said Antonio; "Renato is a grand fellow. What a pity he should have spoilt everything with this mystery, a mystery certain to be found out sooner or later, and to get him into trouble with his own family or with hers! As things are now a marriage of course is impossible; even supposing the aversion of Margherita's father to be overcome, his own family remains."

"And the fact of the lawsuit, and all the comments and deductions which must be made in court," added Garantini. "As things are, and as far as I can see, humanly speaking, it is a gloomy look-out. Happily, Renato is young and strong; he will be all right again. If he could forget!"

"That I doubt," replied Antonio; "Renato is much too firm and tenacious for that. Do you remember his coat-of-arms? A heart of gold; but the antique shape of his shield, the distinguishing mark of all the Altavilla family, is an iron heart. And tell me, Garantini, what am I to say to the old princess, who is waiting so impatiently for me?"

"Well, that I have told you nothing, because I have nothing to tell."

"Will she believe me?"

"My dear Antonio, if you think over it a little you

will find some way of making her believe it. Now that I have told you so much, it seems hard to you that others should be resigned to knowing so little. But remember that you yourself, when you came to me, thought that in the sick man's mind there probably was some confusion. Make the most of that. He may have fallen in love, without our knowing how or when, don't you see; and the lawsuit too, so annoying to his family, may have made an impression on him; and about this I have nothing new to say, nothing not already known in Casa Caivano. In his delirium he talks of the things that occupied him most—this girl and the lawyer on the opposite side; so they are accidentally coupled together in this monstrous fashion. It will be a falsehood, but a pious one; and as this is allowable in doctors, it ought to be allowable in lawyers too, and especially to friends."

Antonio shook Garantini's hand and departed, after promising to bring or send him every day some news of Renato; as Garantini, from motives of delicacy, and also lest the prince should become suspicious, could not go himself.

As he came into the ante-room Antonio Carafa was as much astonished as he had been in the study, on hearing the name of the family with which his poor friend had become entangled. In that ante-room the Prince of Caivano himself was waiting his turn of audience.

"Unfortunate people," said Antonio, to himself. "He knows something."

And he walked straight to the door, not without some fear that the prince, though he was standing in

the recess of a window, with his head partly turned away, might have recognized him. But Don Federigo was so absorbed in his own thoughts that, though he saw the man pass whose departure he had been waiting for, he did not even look at him.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

DON FEDERIGO had once before spoken to Signor Garantini, and that, the reader may remember, was when the Prince of Caivano had refused the proposal of an arrangement which Garantini had made to him.

How did it happen then that Don Federigo, having on that occasion taken leave of the lawyer very drily, should of his own accord come to see him now?

The prince had only heard of his son's illness that morning, and pretty late too, just as he was leaving his rooms for breakfast. A few minutes earlier, as it were to announce this meal, Renato was in the habit of going to see his father, to wish him good-morning. But on this occasion it was the servant who came to tell him that breakfast was ready, before he had seen his son, and in the dining-room there was only his wife and his youngest daughter. Neither Renato nor his mother were to be seen.

"What novelty is this?" demanded Don Federigo, with a frown.

"Renato is unwell, my dear, and your mother is with him," said the princess, whose eyes bore traces of weeping.

"Unwell! How? and how long?"

"Since yesterday evening, when he came home. You were not told, nor I either till this morning, lest we should be alarmed. In the meantime they sent for a doctor, and he says he is a little feverish."

Don Federigo in reality cared for no one except himself. But, loving himself, his name, the honour of his family, and the continuation of the noble race of Altavilla, were dear to him. Therefore, as a legitimate consequence, he was particularly fond of Renato, his eldest, and indeed only son, and the centre of all his hopes. The affection of many fathers is of this kind, and it is natural enough.

For these reasons the most illustrious Don Federigo Altavilla, Prince of Caivano, did what for many years he had never done—he made his way to his son's rooms. He was received by his mother, whose face, looking calm and beautiful under her white hair, bore traces of her concern and anxiety at this sudden illness of her beloved grandson.

"Well, mother dear?"

"I wouldn't have you told, Federigo," replied the old lady. "Let us hope that it is some passing trifle; perhaps only a sun-stroke."

"My dear mother, this is not the season for sun-strokes. We have had no summer yet, nor spring either, it seems to me."

"What can I say, Federigo? I really don't know. Happily the doctor has seen him, and thinks it nothing serious."

The prince then went into Renato's room. The windows were closed and admitted but little light, and the feverish air of the room was quite perceptible. Renato seemed drowsy, and in this state of broken slumbers he was from time to time murmuring a few words, quite incomprehensible to the listeners.

"He has fallen asleep at last," said the old princess, as she tenderly wiped the perspiration from his forehead and cheeks; "he was a little delirious this morning, but that is gone, and, as you see, poor Renato is calmer."

"Can you tell me how this came about?"

"I cannot; yesterday evening he came in, about eleven o'clock, with his friend Don Antonio Carafa, who sat up all night with him, and early this morning he sent for me. He had met Renato in the street, very unwell; so he called a carriage and brought him home."

"And that is all you know, mother?"

"That is all."

Donna Anna might have added that Antonio Carafa had found his young friend in the vestibule at the Fiorentini, and that he had been present at a certain scene, probably the origin of this illness. But the old lady was prudent; and she had no wish to make her son uneasy the very first thing. Antonio Carafa, too, had besought her not to breathe a word of what he had seen and guessed to any one else.

Don Federigo stood for a moment preoccupied, like a man trying to discover a clue to the mystery in his own mind in vain.

"When does the doctor return?" he then asked.

"At twelve," she said.

"You will let me know then, mother."

And he left the room to go to his breakfast, and to soothe the apprehensions of his wife. Soon after he repaired to the steward's apartment, for the daily settling of accounts. Don Federigo was a prudent man; he spent a great deal as befitting his position, but he liked to see it all set down in his account-book, to the very last ducat.

"Well, Turiello, have you heard?"

"Yes, Eccellenza; Don Renato is not well."

"But what can have happened to the poor boy, I ask; and no one can tell me. I would give, I don't know what, to understand how it happened."

"I think," stammered Signor Turiello, "if Eccellenza promises—I don't wish to incur the displeasure of the duke."

"Where I am concerned, Signor Turiello," interrupted the prince, who had pricked up his ears at the steward's first words, "there can be no question about any duke's anger. Speak, Turiello, I am his father, and I have a right to know everything."

This was just what Signor Turiello wished. He was just as anxious to speak as his master was to hear.

"Excuse me, Eccellenza," he said, looking quite humbled and confused, "since you desire it, I will tell you all that I have happened to hear."

And then, after a few words about the box in the theatre—nothing extraordinary in itself, for on other occasions Renato had put the key at the disposal of the steward and his family—Signor Turiello came to mention the hasty departure of the duke from the

Fiorentini, where till that moment he had been sitting quietly, and apparently enjoying himself. At first he could not understand what all this meant; then as he looked up he saw, in a box opposite, Signor Martino Palmanova, a friend of his, with his daughter and another girl, and this had reminded him of something which he, Turiello, had wished to tell the prince a few days ago, but he had not had courage to do it.

"Tell me now, at any rate, in God's name!" cried the prince, whose curiosity was greatly excited by this exordium.

Signor Turiello then narrated the proposed marriage between Signor Martino Palmanova and Margherita Altavilla, Signor Ruggero's daughter, the cousin (or pretended cousin, said Turiello, like a proper courtier as he was) of the prince, and his adversary in this lawsuit. Signor Palmanova knew nothing of this relationship, and when he had proposed for Margherita had had no idea of the aristocratic pretentions of the family nor of their other designs. He only heard of it later, when his generous offer had been rejected. It was for the sake of a certain Errico di Sarno, who was making love to the girl, and making himself agreeable to her father. Well, this young gentleman whom Signor Martino had seen was not Errico di Sarno at all; it was Don Renato, Duke of Melito, and son of Don Federigo, Prince of Caivano.

The prince was as much astonished at this announcement of Turiello's as if a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet.

"Perhaps you are mistaken, Turiello," he exclaimed,

before he had recovered from his surprise. "Could Signor Palmanova have seen right?"

"Any mistake was quite impossible," replied the steward. "I showed Signor Martino the portrait of Don Renato, and he was quite certain that this was his Errico di Sarno. That incident yesterday evening quite convinced me. Don Renato rushed out of the box as soon as he had seen this girl. Why? I cannot explain it to you, Eccellenza, though I pondered over it the whole night. His reasons must have been very good to bring him to this pass. It might perhaps be a fit of jealousy at seeing the girl and Signor Palmanova together—perhaps because he hadn't told these people his real name, and was afraid of being recognized; in short, I don't know what to make of it, Eccellenza; and you, with your cleverness, will be better able than I am to find out the clue."

These flatteries of the steward were lost on Don Federigo. His mind was full of other things, and he was not in a condition either to listen to him or even to speculate on that encounter in the theatre, which at a calmer moment would have appeared to him too improbable to have happened by accident. His son intimate in this way with the enemies of his house! It was enough to make him knock his head against the wall. His son! And did they know him to be the Duke of Melito? Certainly *he* must have known them to be the opponents of the Caivano family at law. Therefore it was only reasonable to suppose that they knew him too, and that they had laid a trap and ensnared him, to get him to marry this girl. Then there was this false name. But might they not have

invented it between them, to conceal their infamous plot better from their neighbours and friends? And even supposing it were not so, would they not profit by this false name, and then by bringing his son into trouble, get him all the more easily into their hands?

All these thoughts crowded into the prince's mind and made him furious. He thought of going to his son and making a scene. But to what purpose with a sick man, and so seriously ill too as he seemed to be? Ill! and why? What had happened? Had these villains already so much influence over his son as to be the arbiters of his health in this way?

You can imagine how impatiently he waited for the doctor's visit. That morning passed without either riding or fencing exercises, which the old gentleman had taken regularly every day for the last twenty-five or thirty years.

The doctor came punctually at twelve, as he had promised the Donna Anna. Though he saw a slight improvement in Renato, he could not help after a fresh investigation giving it its proper name—meningitis—without any circumlocution. And as Don Federigo was little the wiser for this abtruse term, the doctor proceeded kindly to explain it to him, along with some others of a similar kind, adding however that there was no need for serious apprehension, seeing that he, the doctor, had been called in so promptly.

So Don Federigo's mind being set at ease in this way, his thoughts were occupied with the future instead, and without delay, as if it had been an inspiration, he went to see Signor Garantini. He did

not even stop to consider, that before going to see the lawyer on the opposite side, he might have consulted his own. Besides, with the intentions he had in his head, no advice was necessary; no code, no jurisprudence could be of use to him in his present frame of mind.

If Don Federigo could ever have imagined that the cause of his opponents had been recommended to Signor Garantini by Don Renato, by his own son, it would have given him a fit, or, at the very least, slight congestion of the brain.

Signor Garantini was not less astonished than Antonio Carafa, when the Prince of Caivano made his appearance. However, lawyers are accustomed to surprises, and after a little amazement he recovered himself.

"Prince," said he, "won't you sit down. What can I do for you?"

Don Federigo did not know exactly how to begin. But he remembered that Garantini, in his first interview with him, had begun by saying: "I know and like your son Don Renato; therefore I feel certain that, whether your answer be yes or no, you won't look on me either as a stranger or an opponent."

So, when it came to be his turn to pass through a similar ordeal, he began about Renato.

"Signor Garantini," he said, "my son is ill."

"Oh," exclaimed Garantini, in a low voice, not knowing exactly what to say, as he thought the prince and Antonio must have met in the ante-room.

"Yes, extremely ill," continued the prince, "after a violent shock given him by the Altavillas, your clients."

Having reconnoitred the ground, Don Federigo, as you see, went straight to the point.

Garantini received the blow without flinching, but hesitated for a moment, naturally, after this unexpected attack.

"And, in what way, do you think?"

"I know a good deal," the prince replied; "I know all."

Garantini, notwithstanding his respect for well-to-do clients, could not help shrugging his shoulders.

"Well, then, if you know——"

And his gesture signified: "You need not come to trouble me."

This dumbshow was not lost on Don Federigo.

"Signor," he exclaimed, with a certain amount of dignity, "you must forgive a good deal in a father."

"Oh, of course, of course. We are a sort of father confessors in our profession, and are accustomed to listen to all sorts of things," Garantini replied, promptly. "If you have anything to complain of, though I am your opponent's lawyer—and knowing from experience that I have to do with a gentleman——"

"Enough!" interrupted Don Federigo. "For pity's sake, make no conditions. I must speak with the greatest freedom, or not at all."

Garantini bowed, in expectation of something further from Don Federigo.

"I am inclined to think," proceeded the prince, after a slight pause; "indeed, I feel sure, that you cannot know as much as I do about this business.

Therefore, please don't interrupt me in what I am going to say to you, and let me tell you all."

"Here is another demanding liberty of speech," said Garantini to himself. "Well, if I have permitted Signor Ruggero to pour out on me all the vials of his wrath, why should I not allow the Prince of Caivano to hurl all his invectives against Signor Ruggero on me?"

Then he continued, aloud:

"Signor, you wish to speak about my clients, I see; and though it may give me pain, I will listen quietly."

"Thanks! Besides, I won't abuse your indulgence. My son, Don Renato, knows these people very well."

"These people! Who are they?" Garantini was going to say; but he stopped, knowing that this would delay but not prevent the outburst. So, without taking any notice of the expression, he merely replied:

"They have never spoken to me about him. You may be sure, if they had known him as you say, I should have heard something of it."

"Oh, he knows them; and I can assure you that Don Renato has often been in their house."

"Alas, alas! Who can have told him?" reflected Garantini.

"Yesterday evening," continued the prince, "a scene took place in the Fiorentini, which gives ample confirmation."

"This too!" Garantini was ready to exclaim, beginning to feel himself on thorns.

"Well, Signor Garantini, what do you think of that?"

"Well, I can't tell. First of all, let us clearly understand who we are talking about."

"I am talking of those people, and of the way they have behaved."

"Prince," replied Garantini, most seriously; "up till now, I cannot see that there is anything to talk about, except about the conduct of your son—that noble Renato, and against him I have nothing to say. I know nothing of the assumed name you have hinted at; but, good God, only consider—under a false name, in a city of fifty thousand inhabitants, one may go anywhere. And I can't see where my clients are to blame, supposing the Duke of Melito made their acquaintance under an assumed name."

"Then you think they didn't know?"

"Why, if he went to this house, as you seem to think, I don't see how else it could have been. I consider Signor Ruggero Altavilla to be a perfect gentleman; and now that I know him, I should think so always, even if, instead of being his lawyer, I were yours."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Don Federigo, as if to himself. "But by this time they have heard from Signor Palmanova, who was with them at the Fiorentini, and he knows the Caivano family very well."

The mention of this new personage gave the lawyer a good deal to think about.

"I should like to know who made this mess!" he thought, as he twirled his whiskers. "Who was Don

Renato with at the Fiorentini? With the Schisano girls, by Bacchus! Antonio Carafa saw them. And between Schisano and Palmanova. Yes, yes, they had a hand in it, both of them; and I must warn Signor Ruggero on the one hand, and Antonio on the other."

"Well, then," proceeded Don Federigo, "if they know now, if they can't help knowing how things are, what do they mean to do?"

"I really do not see. Excuse me, I don't quite see what you mean."

He was beginning to lose patience. The prince, too, was nearly at the end of his.

"Signor, for pity's sake," he said, "let us be candid. You admit the facts which I have just related to you."

"And suppose I do?"

"Then, I say, what do these people want? Uncertain as to the result of the lawsuit, are they trying to entrap my son? Driven away from the door, are they trying to come in by the window?"

"I do not think them capable, prince, of any such villainy. This is a supposition which Ruggero Altavilla would consider extremely insulting."

"Let him! by all means, let him!" shouted the prince, feeling as if his enemy were before him, and he himself only twenty-five, at Garantini's daring speech. "I ask nothing better." And he jumped up in an attitude as if he were brandishing a sword.

"Compose yourself, Don Federigo, and let us talk reasonably," replied Garantini, with a wave of his hand. "You certainly had some object in coming to

see me. Let us come to the point. So we shall avoid the danger of annoying one another mutually."

"You are right," said the prince, feeling the force of this courteous way of putting things. "And I am coming to the point, as you said. This lawsuit, which you are conducting for the Altavillas—of Russia—against me, they may either lose or win, may they not?"

"Certainly."

"They are more likely to lose."

"Well, yes or no, just as it happens."

"Well, Signor Garantini, I am going to make a liberal offer. In the first place, if they win, all I can do is to appeal; for you must admit I have a perfect right to do this."

"And they also, if they lose."

"Precisely. But I, whether I win or lose, have a proposal to make, and I request you to convey it to them."

"What!" exclaimed Garantini. "That settlement which I suggested at the very beginning?"

"Yes, I understand what you mean. Then I confess I made a mistake. I could not foresee what has happened since. Moreover, it can be looked on as an amicable arrangement, though I don't consider it as such. I make them an offer of two hundred thousand lire, provided they give up all idea of a marriage, and let my son alone; and in case, after his recovery, he should persist in this foolish fancy, they do their best honestly and sincerely to put this ridiculous idea out of his head. What do you think?"

"Well, it is not a bad offer; only——"

"Only——?"

"All I can say, Eccellenza, is what Dante said five hundred and sixty years ago: 'The way of doing it, I don't like.'"

"Because——?"

"I mean, prince, that I don't think this imperious way likely to succeed with your opponents."

"But how?" cried the old gentleman, who considered he had made an unheard-of effort, and who now lost his patience entirely. "Must I submit myself to their good pleasure? What can you be thinking of, Signor? This is the first and it shall be the last time for me to talk of people like them—you may be quite certain. I have troubled myself too much about them already. But what can I do? I see my son ill, perhaps dying. Well," said the Prince of Caivano, raising his voice with almost savage energy; "though he is my only son, and if he should be the last of my race, I could not consent, I never will consent to his doing what these people wish; I swear, before God, I would rather see him dead than dishonoured."

Garantini remained silent; he was considering. With that doughty paladin of all the old rights and privileges there is nothing to be done. With such people discussion is useless. Garantini being powerless in this respect to help, decided to let his poor friend alone, and instead to turn his attention to the prince's proposal.

"Signor," he said, after giving a little time to the thoughts with which his head was filled, "like Caronda di Sibari, I shall be the first to observe the law

made by myself. I shall say nothing about the opinion you seem to have of my client. I come instead to your proposal, and I should like to know if it is final?"

"A gentleman does not go back from his word," replied Don Federigo with dignity; "and that word I have said already."

"Nothing else?"

"How?"

"To put it in writing, for instance."

The prince seemed undecided for a moment.

"Of course," added Garantini, "I don't wish to propose anything that might compromise you. I only ask you to put your proposal in writing, that your terms may be clear, and lest I should say something not entirely in accordance with your intentions. And if your terms are not accepted you may depend, and I give you my word as a gentleman, that my client will consider the offer as if it had never been made."

Don Federigo replied with a bow; then walked up to Garantini's writing-table, took up a pen and wrote—

"I offer two hundred thousand lire to Ruggero Altavilla in case he loses the lawsuit brought against me and my family, with the stipulation that his daughter, Donna Margherita, never marries my son Don Renato; but, on the contrary (and in this I depend entirely on Don Gennaro Garantini's honour), deprives my son of all hopes in the matter. In this way, unless Ruggero Altavilla wins the lawsuit in the first instance and on the appeal (in which case a feeling

of dignity ought to prevent my aforesaid son, Don Renato, from taking as alms what he had already lost), Signor Ruggero Altavilla, before receiving the two hundred thousand lire, must sign a formal document to the effect that I am giving them, not because I admit of any right on his part to the inheritance which came to me from my father, but to keep Don Renato from contracting an alliance against my express desires with the enemies of my family."

To this he appended his signature: "Don Federigo Altavilla, Prince of Caivano."

"And," he added, when he had done, "please see if this writing is in the proper form."

"It is your offer clearly expressed," replied Garantini, after reading the document presented to him by Don Federigo. "I will convey your offer to Ruggero Altavilla, and let you know the result of his deliberations."

Don Federigo made another bow, and prepared to go.

"Prince," added Garantini, "will you oblige me by letting me know sometimes how Don Renato is?"

"In his name I thank you," replied Don Federigo; "I will let you know to-day the opinion of the doctors. We hope, however," he added, with a sigh, "that the result of all this trouble will only be some uneasiness to his parents."

Whereupon he took his leave, and this father of the old-fashioned type walked out of Garantini's study, stately in his bearing and severe of countenance, like a man who considers he has done his duty and attended properly to the honour of the family.

"This man is a fool, but an honest one," exclaimed Garantini, by way of epilogue. "If there has been a thief in the Caivano family, he certainly wasn't an accomplice. And now, let us recapitulate. The case comes on at the end of twenty days. If we win, this proposal of the prince's remains a dead letter, because Don Renato, in a penniless position, would not ask the girl to marry him. If we lose in this compact, whether he means it or not, there is a sort of recognition of Don Ruggero's rights. And as for healing up the wounds of love—bah!" concluded Garantini, "that is not the business of a lawyer."

And he rang for the faithful Pascariello, wishing to send the prince's proposal at once to Don Ruggero.

"And," he reflected, shaking his head sadly, "poor Renato! There he is, lying unconscious on his sick bed, while his future is being settled in this way. But does it always happen that the Fates ratify what fathers and lawyers have settled? I know if this be the work of destiny, I can only bow to it in silence."

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